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THE DARKY DETECTIVE; OR,



HE ALLOWED THEM TO PASS ON, PRESENTLY ARISING TO HIS KNEES AND CREEPING AFTER THEM.

Old Jupe's Clew;

OR,

THE DARKY DETECTIVE.

BY MRS. ORRIN JAMES.

CHAPTER I.

THE BELLE OF NEW BRISTOL.

It was nearly sunset of a summer afternoon; bars of crimson light lay along the river and the low green bluffs, and beautified the ugly, straggling *new* village, which lay between bluffs and river; but the prettiest thing they lighted upon was the face of Mary Miller, as she sat in the door of her father's house and looked down upon the shipping. For, although New Bristol was but a town in its babyhood, it had an extensive water-front, and was a favorite stopping-place of many boats which plied the Missouri, as several stage-routes led away from it, and it furnished a large quantity of lumber for that wood-famished region.

The "miller's house" was back from the village proper, on a fine bluff which overlooked the flats beneath it; still, it was not over a quarter of a mile from the main street which ran along the shore. It was a small, unpainted affair; but it had a cottonwood tree to shade it, and Mary had planted a hop-vine at the gable end of the dwelling, which grew quite to the chimney-top.

There were but three inmates of the cabin, father, mother, and this daughter, now about nineteen, and having the name of being the handsomest girl in New Bristol. She was the child of a second marriage, Mr. Miller having a daughter four years older than Mary, who had refused to accompany them when they emigrated to the West, dreading the hardships of a new country, preferring to stay with an aunt who offered her a home in their native State of New York.

As Mary sat there, idly, resting after the heat of the day, it was evident that she was not so closely watching the bustle and confusion incident upon the arrival of a large steamer simply to pass away the time. She was expecting somebody. Quite likely it was for this somebody that she had braided her rich brown hair so smoothly and placed a wild-rose in it, which she had gathered out of the grass near at hand. And for him, that the pink calico was ironed so nicely, and the little white apron tied on so trimly.

Sitting there in the doorway, she made a lovely picture, her red cheeks redder in the sunset, with the smile of expectation in her eyes. Handsome as fine features, complexion, and figure could make her, she possessed a still greater charm in a peculiar expression of innocence and sweet temper. This sweet temper it was which made her the comfort and delight of her parents, who had scarcely grieved over Annette's determination to remain at the East. Annette always was selfish, grumbling at every privation, but Mary was their sunshine, warming them when cold, cheering them when clouded with ease and toil.

Suddenly Mary shaded her eyes with her hand, peering eagerly at a couple who had left the boat, crossed the town, and were coming up the road toward the house. She knew the lithe figure and elastic step of the young man; it was for *him* she had been looking; her heart bounded and cheeks tingled as she saw him coming; but the joy of certainty was now disturbed by wonder at who the other visitor could be. Presently she sprung to her feet, calling out:

"Mother, here's Nettie, as sure's you're alive!"

"Nettie! pshaw! get out, child! you must be crazy!"

"I tell you 'tis, mother. And she's coming up from the boat with Luke Bryant. He must have taken passage at St. Louis, and they've got acquainted on the way."

Mrs. Miller threw down her mending and came to the door. Neither of the women seemed so glad as might have been supposed at seeing so near a relative. Not that Mary did not love her half-sister; she really had a good deal of affection for her, in spite of the other's selfishness and coldness; but, something in the air of the young couple struck a chill of jealousy to her heart. Luke was carrying Nellie's sachel, and talking in a most animated way, and she, in turn, seemed to be in the highest spirits. She was gayly dressed, too, quite eclipsed simple Mary, with her dress of flounced berage, her black silk mantle and jaunty bonnet. So that, although Mary was glad to see her, as we have said, a pang ran through her breast. None knew better than herself the art and craft of her sister; now how successful she could be in pleasing men when she took the trouble to try; Mary knew already that Nettie admired Luke and was anxious to be admired in turn. However, generous as the sunshine, she put away the bad feeling, and ran down the road to clasp her sister in her arms.

"I declare, Nettie, you *have* given us a surprise! So you have concluded to risk all the horrors of 'Out West!' Indians, bears, bug-bears, and all?"

"Yes, dear; your last letter painted things in such bright colors, I just took a sudden fancy I'd come. You know I was teaching school the last six months, so I had money enough for the journey, and I packed up and started at twenty-four hours' notice."

"I hope you'll like us better than you think. And how fortunate that you happened on the same boat with Mr. Bryant, seeing he's an acquaintance of ours, and could tell you all about us." And then Mary turned to shake hands with Luke.

Nettie darted a glance from her black eyes as the two exchanged greetings, and a pang went through *her* heart as she saw how matters stood between them, for Mary could not keep her blushes out of sight, nor Luke his pleasure at seeing them.

In the midst of the excitement, when the parents came out to greet the new-comer, Luke contrived to steal a kiss from the glowing cheek of his affianced. Annette saw the act, for her sharp eyes were incessantly upon them.

"Ah, ha, that's the fashion out West, is it?" she cried.

"Yes, when people are as good as married," answered Luke, sturdily. "Mary and I are to join hands in October."

"So soon?" There was disappointment in her voice, which she could not entirely hide. "Why didn't you tell me, sis, that you had caught a prize?"

"I was not engaged when I wrote you last, Nettie," and then, Mary, not yet accustomed to have her sweet secret blazoned abroad, hid her embarrassment by an extra display of diligence in providing for the refreshment of the travelers. The kettle was already boiling in a little summer-kitchen outside; she set the tea "a-steeping," arranged the table, and sent Nettie into the bedroom to take off her bonnet and wash her face.

Soon the little party was gathered about the evening meal; the cooking was nice and neatly served, like all that Mary did. Nettie looked out the door at the broad landscape, brightened by the glistening river, but oftener at the brown, pleasant face and manly ways of Luke Bryant.

"It's not so bad here, after all. I wish I'd a come out last year, when the rest did," she said.

"I think it's delightful here. I went to more dances last winter than I ever did in my life before."

Mary had been the belle of these pleasure-parties, and it was not strange she found them charming. In truth, if she had not written such glowing letters to her half-sister about the gayety of the new town and the great plentifulness of beaux, that person would hardly have been now established her near and dangerous rival. Perhaps a paragraph in Mary's last letter giving, among others, a description of Luke, had as much influence as anything in bringing her to her hasty conclusion. At all events, here she was, and there did seem to be a fate in it.

Luke Bryant was mate of a steamboat, which ran between St. Louis and the "up-country." The Missouri boats do not venture to run in the night, especially when the water is low, owing to the impossibility of keeping in the tortuous channel; and as New Bristol was a favorite stopping-place, the mate had not infrequent evenings to spend in the town. A perfect wonder for the mate of a river-boat, never drinking, gambling or keeping bad company, he naturally sought the society of ladies during his unemployed hours. He had been introduced to Mary Miller at the house of a mutual friend, had danced with her often at balls, from the first admiring her more than any woman he ever had met. This summer—during a cessation of navigation for six weeks, owing to the low water—he employed his leisure to bring the acquaintance to a closer intimacy; and when he finally proposed for Mary's hand, neither she nor her parents were inclined to refuse.

Luke's reputation stood high; he was considered a young man of unimpeachable honor; his business prospects were excellent, as, besides his liberal salary as mate, he had many opportunities for "speculating," which he had the sagacity to turn to advantage. Added to these sterling virtues, was a good share of manly beauty, and a certain grace of manner, caught from seeing so much of the world as came constantly under

his observation. No wonder that simple, unsophisticated Mary Miller thought that she had won the prince of men; nor that she should be an object of envy to many whose fathers had more of worldly goods than hers. The lovers were well matched; both handsome, good, and very much attached to each other.

Nettie, burning with silent jealousy of her younger sister, watched their happiness with smiling eyes, while resolved, if art could do it, to work mischief between them.

She had, as if by some untoward fate, taken passage in the boat of which Luke was mate. Seeing her to be lonely and without a male protector, he had, during the ten days' trip, been kind and attentive to the stranger. It was some time before he chanced to learn her name and destination; when he found that she was not only a Miller, but the half-sister of his Mary, his heart warmed toward her; and, without telling her of his engagement, he proclaimed himself a friend of the family, and was so impressive in his attentions as to awaken a deeper interest in Annette than he intended.

Restless, unsettled, unhappy, tired of the past, and not knowing what the future promised, she was quite in the mood to give way to the impulse which seized upon her. Before the boat reached New Bristol, she was more desperately in love than she had ever before been; and quite as desperately determined that this handsome and well-to-do mate should return her liking. She scarcely thought of Mary as a possible rival. When the family started for Missouri, two years previously, Mary was just giving the first promise of that beauty which had since bloomed into such perfection. Accustomed to rule her younger relative, to have everything her own way, Annette did not realize that Mary had outgrown her bondage, and had rights and powers of her own.

It was, therefore, a severe shock to her when she saw how matters really stood—her sister excelling her in every charm, and loved by the man whom she had allowed herself to consider her own property.

Annette was a dashing-looking young lady, with black hair and eyes, and a graceful form. As she sat in the little house, after tea, chatting in the easiest style, saying pretty things, and wearing her flounces and ribbons with such an air, poor Mary thought herself quite outshone. Not so thought Luke. He regarded her as all the more lovely in contrast with her showy sister. If Annette was ever to creep into Mary's place, she had not yet gained the slightest foothold.

At eleven o'clock Luke had to return to his duties. He would not see New Bristol again for several days, and he and his betrothed had a hundred little things they wished to whisper to each other. But Annette continued to usurp the first place in every one's attention, and he went away without one stolen word to his darling.

Thus it continued all the remainder of the summer.

The month of the wedding was close at hand; Luke had bought the wedding-dress, and Mary's pretty fingers were busy with making up her outfit.

At this time the very spirit of evil took pos-

session of Annette. Finding herself powerless to fascinate Luke, who continued true as steel to his first preference, she went to him, asking a private interview, and told him an artful, seemingly true, but most atrocious falsehood about Mary, stating that the reason her parents had emigrated to the West, was to hide the disgrace she had brought on the family, she having been detected in filching goods from a store, and only escaping arrest and imprisonment because of her youth, and the sympathy felt for her father. The goods had been restored, a sum of money paid, and then Mary had been taken away from the scene of her guilt. The reason Annette gave for betraying the disgraceful secret to Luke, was to place him on his guard, when Mary should become his wife, and enable him to keep such a watch over her as should prevent her exercising her *mania* (that was what Annette called it) for taking things which were not her own. In conclusion, she begged him not to let her parents know that she had forewarned him, as it would almost kill them.

All this was done so artfully, with such appearance of distress at the necessity for making the revelation, that Luke Bryant might almost have been pardoned had the poison had its intended effect. He listened in silence until the girl was through; then he turned upon her with a rebuke so withering, a dislike so positive, that she quailed before it, and shrunk into the guilty creature she was.

Although he did not allude to it, Annette knew that Luke read the secret of her love for him, and that she had laid a snare to catch him, through the ruin of her sister's happiness; she knew that she had lost his respect, had inspired his distrust and dislike, and had not injured Mary in the least.

From that hour, all the strength of her passionate, ill-regulated mind was turned into hate for both. This young couple, so admired and loved by others, was hated by her with a fierce energy born of unrequited love, humbled pride, anger, mortification and despair. But this feeling was concealed with a duplicity which deceived even Luke, who knew, by experience, so well of what she was capable. She took his rebuke gently, confessed her wrong, prayed his pardon, and thenceforth seemed to enter, heart and soul, into the preparations for the wedding, trying to prove her repentance by good deeds. So kindly was her aid furnished, so busy did she keep herself, with Mary's affairs, that the latter's love and gratitude flowed forth to her abundantly. Even Luke, as we have said, forgave her, pitied her, and felt anxious to prove his growing good-will toward her.

"Do you know, I was almost afraid Nettie was in love with you, at one time," Mary whispered, the night before the wedding. "I am glad I was mistaken; it would have made me so unhappy."

CHAPTER II.

JUPE'S HOLE IN THE HILL.

THE wedding took place, and made talk all over that part of the country. Everybody was invited; the little house could not begin to hold the guests, so it was made an out-door

party, with a great circular table under the noble old cottonwood tree, and music and dancing afterward by moonlight.

The bride was so sweet and beautiful that white-headed old men longed to be young and begin life again with such a partner. Only one cloud lightly dimmed the happy time. This was that Annette, who was bridesmaid, insisted upon choosing for her assistant a man whom circumstances had rather compelled Luke to invite, but whom he, by no means, wished to honor as his groomsman. This was a young fellow who traveled a great deal up and down the river, professing to be a land-agent, but whom Luke suspected to be a regular Mississippi River gambler, if nothing worse.

Being on the boat on its trip, the day before the wedding, and stopping over at New Bristol, he had laughingly demanded an invitation, in such a way that Luke could not withhold it. It seems that Nettie had met him twice or thrice at balls, and when told that he was to be a guest at the wedding, she immediately declared that she liked Mr. Parcell immensely and was going to have him for "best man." Luke objected to this, as there was more than one friend of his own to whom he would have given the preference; but Nettie was obstinate; and as she had been so good and gentle of late, the young couple did not like to arouse her temper; so she had her own way, and Parcell stood as groomsman.

This, as we have said, was the only cloud upon the heaven of their happiness; after the wedding they went east on a brief journey, and returning to St. Louis were pained and astonished beyond words, to meet another couple on their bridal-tour—that couple Annette and Mr. Parcell. They were stopping at the best hotel; he wore a diamond ring, and gave her money to buy expensive clothes.

"I told you," she said, with a strange smile in her black eyes, "that I would not long remain behind you, Mary. Why don't you congratulate us? I think you very impolite."

"Give us time," said Luke, making an effort to hide his chagrin; "we are taken by surprise you see."

"I don't doubt it," she answered, with an unpleasant laugh. "You'd better spend the winter at home, Molly; father and mother will be so lonely. Good-by, my dears; we are bound for New Orleans, and shall not be back until next spring."

"Mr. Parcell was very courteous; he said 'how do you do,' and 'good-by,' as if he was a brother indeed; the two couples parted, and met no more for a length of time. Except a brief note twice during the winter, her relatives heard nothing from Annette.

Luke Bryant and his happy wife spent a few weeks in St. Louis; then, as Mary had to be left alone when he was on the river, they concluded to gratify both her wish and that of her parents, by making it their home with them for the winter. Navigation closed early that season, a sudden term of bitter cold weather freezing up the streams just before Christmas, so that Luke had the holidays to spend with his bride. Bright days were those! Life appeared one long promise of bliss to the young couple—sleigh-rides, sup-

pers, dances, visits, with cosey, quiet evenings at home, made more delightful by the contrast!

In the mean time New Bristol, in common with several of its sister towns, was getting up a great excitement. The whole country along the Missouri was in a state of anger and uneasiness at the immense amount of counterfeit money which had been imposed upon the community. All silver and gold seemed to be filled; all the bank-notes spurious. The loss grew to be a serious matter, and coupled, as it chanced to be, with the failure of two or three banks in which great confidence had been placed, excited the community into a general uprising for mutual protection. For some reasons, not important to give, it was finally decided that the headquarters of the counterfeiters were not far from New Bristol; so that this town came in for an extra portion of the common agitation. A Vigilance Committee was formed, at the instance and approval of the best citizens. Luke Bryant was solicited to join it, and did so, considering it his duty to aid in the protection of the community. He felt that every honest man should do his best to aid in driving out, or exterminating, the horde of criminals—men of the blackest character, gamblers, counterfeiters and highwaymen, who seemed to have been chased out of Kentucky and Ohio only to take refuge in Missouri.

Perhaps he felt more keenly from the fact that he, expert as he was in judging of money, had lost quite a sum. Added to this was a loss of a thousand dollars by the failure of a St. Louis bank in which he had deposited the surplus of his summer's earnings, with the intention of going into business for himself in the spring. For neither he nor Mary liked the calling he was following, since it must necessarily keep him so much from home.

This loss, though a serious one to them, could not affect the happiness of such young and hopeful persons. Luke had a knowledge of business which stood in lieu of capital, and he kissed the tears off Mary's cheek on the day upon which they heard of this misfortune, and managed to laugh quite cheerfully, when he had broken the news to her.

"Oh, if you can afford to laugh, I'm sure I can," she said, and was bright again in a moment.

"No use crying over spilt milk, as I allers tell Jupe when he comes whinin' round," said Auntie Clare, who had been in the room when Bryant came in with his story, "but if dat bank am broke, I take my asservation dat dem as broke it hab saved the pieces—so!"

Auntie had never been in a court-room to give testimony, for she was a black, and had not that privilege, but she had a favorite habit of "taking her asservation," whatever that was, upon every occasion which demanded energy of opinion. When we were first introduced to the Millers they kept no help; but when Luke came into the family he would no longer permit this state of affairs. So, a faithful colored man and wife being obtained for a reasonable compensation, a shanty was built for them behind the main house; and it was the woman who now expressed her shrewd belief that the officers of the broken bank had saved the pieces. Where she obtained her knowledge of

the mysteries of financial cries, we can not say; but no doubt her surmise was not a ridiculous one.

"You've hit the nail on the head, auntie," remarked Luke.

"Laws, t'ank you, Massa Bryant," she answered, dropping a delighted courtesy. "I only wish you could hit dem as straight on de head. W'at wid wild-cat banks and counterfighting, don't no w'at dis country's comin' to. I's glad I's only a nigger, and got all my money wrapped up in a rag and put away in dat broken pitcher."

"Then you have some money, have you?" asked Mary, mischievously.

"Got some? who said so?" cried auntie, dismayed at finding she had betrayed the one sweet hope and comfort of her life. "Got a few coppers, and six dimes, tied up in rag, to buy um new apron when I goes to town. Laws, don't t'ink poor nigger slave hab money, chile?" and she shot a sharp twinkle out of her black eyes at her young mistress.

"Oh, you need not be afraid to tell us," laughed Mary, "we don't own you, and sha'n't take it away from you. We are glad you have it. Come, now, auntie, how much have you got, tied up in that rag in that broken pitcher? Isn't a broken pitcher as bad as a broken bank?"

"Laws, chile, how funny you be," said auntie, who liked Mary immensely already, and would have served her with the blind devotion peculiar to her people, had any need arisen. "If I was to chuse, I'd take de pitcher—so! Dat's what Jupe's allers askin' when he comes whinin' round—"how much money you got, Clare? and whar is it?—fer, you see, I don't let him guess whar I keeps it, else he'd spend his hullevenin's counting of it over. W'en he's armed a little by extra jobs, he allers gives it to me to put away; he's a good nigger, 'bout some t'ings, Jupe is, dough he boddors me awful, whinin' round w'en I'm so busy I don't no w'ich end I stand on."

Her listeners laughed again; for if auntie had a crying sin it was that of laziness, while her poor husband, of whom she always spoke as if he were a dog, was a most cheerful, active, industrious fellow.

"What are you saving up money for?" Mary went on; she being an Eastern girl, was not yet so familiar with the colored people, but that she was amused with and curious about them.

Again Clare darted upon her that flashing glance.

"'Spect to lib in bondage all our days, purty much, but don't 'spect to die in it. No, Miss Bryant, 'spects to buy ourselves in our ole age, and go up to de land ob Canaan, ober de riber Jordan, jes' as free to take our ch'ice ob de bes' seats as anybody. W'en we knocks at de door and de Lord calls out 'Who's dar?' we 'tends to show him our free papers, so's he'll say, 'Walk right up to de front pew, and don't sit dar under de gallery.'"

At which her audience could but be amused, although impressed with the earnest, solemn manner of the negress.

"Oh, that is it? I hope, with all my heart,

you'll have your papers, Clara. Don't let anybody know about the pitcher, and then no one will be wanting to rob you."

"I wouldn't min' a-lendin' of it to Massa Bryant, if he's put to any inconvenience by de loss ob de bank," said auntie, after a moment's embarrassed hesitation. "I's sure *he'd* pay it back w'en he got ready, and we don't need it yit."

"Bless your dear old soul!" cried Luke, quite touched, "that I would, with compound interest! But, I don't need it, auntie, not at all; and I thank you just as much for the generous offer."

"Well, if you ever does want it, you jes' gib me de hint. Don't say nothin' to Jupe, fer he'd jes' come whinin' round, dough I'm sartain sure he'd be more dan willin' to len' de money to you. Massa Bryant," she added, suddenly, changing the subject: "does yer honor know what Jupe's trotted off for dis arternoon, into de woods, arter chipmunks?"

"You just said, after chipmunks."

"Well, it's distensably arter chipmunks; but it's de antipodes of what's he ra'ly about. He's got on de scent, and I guess he'll run 'em down."

"Run what down? Has he found bears? I suspected they'd be coming down this cold weather."

"B'ars! no! Wuss varmints dan b'ars. I tells you, dough, Jupe'll bark at me fer not keeping clus. Howsomever, his bark's wuss'n his bite. He got on de scent," sinking her voice to a whisper, "of a den of dem counterfighters. He's tracked 'em to a cave, an' seen um to work makin' silber quarters and halves, by the peck-measure full. He was a-spyin' of 'em half last night. To-night he wants to take you, and all de Vigilance Committee out, and surround dem."

"You don't say say so, auntie!" cried Luke, fairly turning white with the excitement of the discovery.

"Yis, I do say so. I don' like to tell it, but Jupe he's a-growlin' like any thing, 'cause he says he almost sartain sure one dem willains is dat flashy-lookin' young man as come here last fall and married Miss Annette!"

"Impossible!" almost screamed Mary.

"He must have been mistaken," said Luke, more calmly. "Nettie's husband is in New Orleans. We had a letter from them last week. He could not very well be in two places at a time."

"Dat's so, and Jupe's such a fool. He's allers barkin' at de moon. Here he comes hisself. Now doin' your brea' I tol' yer; 'cause he wants all de glorry hisself."

Truly enough, Jupe slowly opened the door, thrusting his woolly head in, and rolling his eyes all about in a mysterious manner. The family would have paid little attention to his mystifications, had they not possessed the key to his movements. As it was, Luke was burning with impatience, and soon had the secret out of him, despite Jupe's reluctance to give it up so easily.

Jupe was a man of unusual sagacity; could follow a trail, or keep a secret to the end. When out hunting, several days previous, by permission of his master, to supply himself with meat, he had chanced upon a slight discovery which had set him to thinking. He had found a single,

new, bright, quarter dollar, there, in the deepest, darkest part of the forest. He lay down, covered himself over with leaves, and watched for hours. When he was about giving up, two men came along, dressed as hunters, with game-bags on their backs and rifles in their hands. Jupe did not believe them to be hunters, nor that they had game in their bags. He allowed them to pass on, presently arising to his knees and creeping after them as stealthily as an Indian, until he saw them enter a cave, and disappear within. Jupe was now highly elated. He carefully marked the bearings of the spot, and stole away. That night, by the dim light of the moon he retraced his steps, and with more courage than any one had ever given him credit for, he crept into the mouth of the cave, and found a band of eleven persons in the act of manufacturing spurious money, and discussing their plans for its circulation.

One of these persons, as he confessed to Bryant, "he was afraid *was* his brother-in-law."

"Nonsense," said Luke; "but even if it was, I would not connive at his escape. He should suffer with the rest."

Jupe was certain of catching him that night, as he had heard them distinctly appoint the rendezvous for that time.

"Good for you, boy," cried Luke, striking him on the back; "you have earned the reward of three hundred dollars by that discovery. That's a long stride towards freedom, isn't it?"

"Oh, glory hallelujah!" shouted Clare, "we'se never t'ink of de reward, sure 'nough. Well, Jupe, you've brought um down as well as if you was trained reg'lar. You shall hab some supper to pay for it—hoe-cake wid ra'al syrup and hominy, and white sugar—dat you shall, you onconscionable nigga!"

Jupe retired quite a hero, happier, apparently, in view of the cook's promise of molasses and white sugar, than in the prospective reward of three hundred dollars.

CHAPTER III.

A WOMAN'S ART.

As the short winter twilight crept over New Bristol, an intense but secret excitement prevailed through the town. The Vigilance Committee having been warned, were quietly preparing to besiege the retreat of the enemy at that hour of the night, when, according to Jupe, they were certain to find the band together. Only old and well-known citizens formed the party, which, to the number of fifty, were soon ready, thoroughly armed, and creeping out of town by various routes, so as not to attract attention to their movements, organizing only after they had reached the depths of the forest. Jupe occupied the post of honor, as leader, followed closely by Luke Bryant, who had been compelled to say good-by thrice to his weeping wife, who would not be convinced that there was no danger.

"We intend to take them by surprise," he assured her "when they are busy at work, with their weapons out of hand."

And so they did; but not quite so successfully as they had hoped; for a sentinel had given warning in time to enable the counterfeiters to catch up their rifles and make a brief defense.

Fifty resolute men against a dozen soon decided the matter; but not until Luke had a flesh-wound in his arm which gave him some pain. Another fine young man was shot in the shoulder. All the inmates of the cave were secured, with the proofs of their guilt about them. Bryant was more relieved than he would like to allow to find that Parcell was not in the gang, for he had dreaded, while affecting to disbelieve, that such might be the case. Jupe solemnly assured him that he *had* been there on the previous night, and that some accident must have kept him away. Luke did not think any too well of his brother-in-law to believe this; but when he found that he was *not* there, he again persuaded himself that there had been some mistake.

"New Orleans is a long distance from here," he mused, "and the journey is not easy at this season of the year. Of course, Jupe was mistaken."

It was after midnight when the Vigilance Committee marched into town, with the prisoners in their midst. Every one not in the secret had retired to slumber; but there were those who watched and waited: in less than half an hour New Bristol was as wide awake as if it were noon; the only bell of the town rung a joyful peal; the citizens gathered in the little square at a signal of an immense bonfire, which was soon kindled, and by the light of which the prisoners were tried. Before daybreak, eight of those wretched men had received fifty lashes from the hands of self-constituted authorities, and were then placed in the jail, which was double-guarded; the other three had received more summary punishment. Taken down the river, a hole was broken in the ice, and the condemned men were plunged in and held under until life was extinct! Such was the greedy vengeance of the hour from people naturally kind and generous, but whose safety had been so often periled and sense of right outraged by these desperadoes and outlaws, that patience no longer became a virtue; to act promptly and relentlessly was but an act of safety.*

Rendered sad and thoughtful by the terrible scenes of the night, Bryant sought his home in the gray dawn, almost unconscious of the pain his arm was giving him. Mary sprung forth to meet him, for, uneasy and fearful, she had sat up all night. The sight of his bandaged arm gave her a thrill of distress, which could hardly be overcome by the assurance that the wound was slight.

"Aunt Clare has some hot coffee for you, Luke; and then you must lie down and rest a few hours. I will send for the doctor to take charge of your wounded arm. How lucky it is not the right one! Oh, Luke, is it not horrible?" and she shuddered.

"Yes, darling, it is. I did not mean to tell you about it at present. But they deserved their fate—richly. We have acted only in self-defense."

* This incident will be recognized by old settlers in Northwestern Missouri, as one of the episodes of their early-day history. All the Western border, fifty years ago, literally swarmed with these desperate characters, and many an unwritten act of summary vengeance was performed by citizens in self-defense.

"I know it. Still, it was dreadful. Why not give them a few hours to prepare for eternity? I trust God will be more merciful than man."

"Would you release tigers to prey on children? Your heart is too soft, Mary. Bring me the coffee, little wife, for really I stand in need of it."

"Jupe's as frisky as a young pup," said Auntie Clare, as she brought in the welcome beverage. "'Clar' to gracious, I'll hab to tie him up, ef he don't sober down 'fore long. He's knocked off my best blue platter, now, wid his frantics. It does set niggers up so when dey do anyt'ing smart, like w'ite folks! Dey's as vain as flitters, niggers is! And Jupe, he's one de wu'st kind. He t'inks hisself quite a lion, 'cause he trapped dem counterfighters; but I tell him dat's a hound's work—sure 'nough, so! I don't t'ink Jupe's so drefle smart. I'm willin' to take my asservation dat if he hadn't foun' dat quarter-dollar in de woods, he never would 'a' knowed noffin' 'bout dose rascals. Anybody could 'a' found dem, arter pickin' up dat quarter-dollar."

"I don't think so, auntie; I think Jupe acted with both courage and discretion. He deserves the three hundred dollars reward, and it's going to be given to him to-day, with a vote of thanks from the citizens," said Luke.

"Law me! how you does flutter a body! Jupe allers was a right smart nigger, else I nebber would 'a' had him. But he's made me a sight o' trouble, learnin' bim to fotch an' carry as he oughter. He's full of tricks. Law me! a vote o' t'anks! He'll be so sot up arter that, I can't manage him. I s'pose he'll want to curl up in a corner an' nebber do no more, w'en he gets dat pile o' money. But I'll chase him out wid de broomstick. He's got to work till we's got our free papers. Law, Miss Mary, you needn't send fer no doctor fer dat hurt. I'll steep some bark, and do it up in less'n no time, so massa will fall right to sleep an' forgit all 'bout it."

She was as good as her word. She managed the wound so that in a few days it was quite well, for Luke had young and healthy blood.

It was shortly after these events, which had so startled them in the midst of their quiet bliss, that an offer was made to Luke Bryant.

Spring was now about to open, and he must either return to his old calling or choose another. The loss of the principal part of his capital had disappointed him in his first project of opening a warehouse in New Bristol. It was a favorable time for proposing a project to him which promised as well as the one now spoken of.

A merchant in St. Louis, who knew him well, and had confidence in his business talents, was quite an extensive shipper of grain. He wrote to Luke that if he would go down to New Orleans and attend, for a few weeks, to the shipment of cargoes from there to Liverpool, and then go over in one of the vessels to look after matters in the latter city, he might have half the profits of the voyage of the vessel in which he should sail. He would assure him five thousand dollars clear gain, in less than five months; besides which, he would have an opportunity to see the world, etc.—all of which was pleasing to

Luke, except the necessity for parting from his young wife.

This was an objection so great that he allowed one mail to go by without answering the merchant's letter. In the mean time, the brave, loyal wife, anxious for Luke's advancement, determined not to be a weight upon his prospects, wrought up her heart to the requisite firmness to insist upon his accepting the offer.

"If you make so much in five months, perhaps you can go into business for yourself, and that, you know, will never take you away from me again. It is worth something to purchase the power of always being together. I will not hold you back."

"It is true, Mary, that with that sum I could build us a charming home. Perhaps I ought not to refuse it."

So the offer was accepted, the arrangements made; and early in April, May found herself once more alone with her parents, trying to be cheerful, but ah, so lonely, so sad—dreaming of storms and shipwrecks, counting the days and weeks.

"If I had known how dreary it would be without Luke, I do not believe I should have had the courage to part from him," she said continually to herself.

About the middle of May the little family was again surprised by an unannounced visit from Annette. She brought with her two large trunks of beautiful clothing, had plenty of money in her purse, quite taking New Bristol by storm, with her little splendors and graces, and her patterns of the latest fashions. She was in the highest spirits, professing to have spent by far the happiest winter of her life. Mr. Parcell could not leave his agencies to accompany her, but he was a most devoted, liberal husband, and she liked him better every day.

"He's off in Mississippi now, attending to the sale of some large plantations there. He started the day I left to come here. I suppose you're surprised to see me; and I certainly should not be here if Luke hadn't urged me to come up and visit you. He found us out as soon as he came to the city. It was quite by his persuasions that I was induced to come. As Parcell would be away some time, and I was alone, I didn't object much, and here I am, ready to cheer your pining soul, Mary! Luke said he knew you would be terribly melancholy—he depended on me to do my best to take up your mind."

It was thus Annette announced herself on the day of her arrival.

Mary was glad to see her, for she had been "of pining and melancholy mood;" then, too, Nettie brought the latest news of Luke; she had seen him, talked with him, brought his last loving message on the day when he finally sailed for Liverpool.

Mary asked so many eager questions about her husband as to call down her sister's ever-ready sarcasm.

"It's a wonder you let your big baby out of your sight, sis. Ain't you afraid he'll fall and hurt himself, or that somebody will not fix his pap just right, or run away with him; or that he'll get lost and not know his way back?"

"Don't you fret any in your husband's ab-

sence?" asked Mary, blushing with the idea of having made herself ridiculous.

"Not a bit, my dear. Parcell and I are very much attached; but I should not expect he'd like me long, if I kept him tied to my apron-string. Men don't like to be kept too close—Luke no more than the rest. He enjoyed himself hugely when he was in New Orleans. We went together, every evening, to some place of amusement. I did not know he could be so gallant."

"It was I who urged him to go to Liverpool," said poor Mary, secretly almost crying with a new jealousy to think that Luke had been so gay, while she had been so lonely; yet ready, with a woman's instinct, to shield him from censure. "I don't wish to tie him to my apron-string. I'm glad he's going to do so well. But it was hard to part with him. It was very good of you, too, Nettie, to come so far to see me. We'll have a nice time, I'm sure, and I'll not try to be foolish."

"That's more like it, sis. You're not an old woman yet. You ought to dash out, as I do, and be gayer than ever. I'd buy pretty things and wear them, if I were you; and go out as I pleased. Luke'll like you all the better for it. When women settle down into drudges after they are married, then husbands pay them for it by looking after new faces."

"I'm not much of a drudge, Nettie; Luke has not let me do a hand's turn since I was his wife."

"Oh, I didn't mean that. Only I'm bound to have a good time, and I want you to share it. I've money to spend, and I mean to spend it for my own enjoyment. I suppose Luke left you comfortably supplied with the needful?" and the black eyes shone out brightly beneath the drooped lashes.

"All I shall want to use, certainly."

"I'm glad you've got a nigger to do the work. I confess to no taste for broiling my face and baking my hands!" continued Annette, as Auntie Clare came into the room, curious to see the new relative, and ready to welcome her with genuine African sunshine.

That was all the greeting she gave auntie.

Old Clare had not lived so long without being able to perceive the difference between a real lady and the false article; Mrs. Parcell's fine clothes and finer airs did not deceive her; she took a strong dislike to the visitor, which she could not at all times conceal from the family.

"Don't you be led away by her," she said, after Annette had been there for several weeks, and had over-persuaded Mary into buying a new silk dress and a handsome shawl: "your clo'es is good enough now, Miss Bryant. Don't car' w'at she says; young ladies whose husbands is away ought to be keerful, and not show off too much. Time 'nough to buy such trash when Massa Bryant is back, safe and soun'. S'posin' ye'd have to go into mournin', them things would be jist throwed away!"

"Oh, don't, auntie!" cried Mary, bursting into tears. "I knew I ought not to have got them, and I did not want them. Nettie teased me into it."

"Don't you be teased by her, I tells ye. I'll take my asservation she ain't round here, as sweet as honey, fer nobody's good. She's got

suthin' on her mind, and it's suthin' bad. She's as perlite as a cat that's after cream."

"Oh, auntie, for shame! Nettie's good enough, only a little selfish. Besides, we have no cream for her to be after."

"Don't no 'bout dat. She ain't here for nuffin', now I tells yer. Nor she didn't come to please you, she ain't so obligin' as all dat. Course, I's a nigger, an' hain't no sense; ne'der do I knows w'at your sister hates you fer; but I've see'd it, and dat's so! I says to Jupe las' night, arter he'd got done gnawin' his bone, 'I don't like Miss Parcell; I've seen mischief in her eye. If she could make trouble, she would!' Jupe, he grumbled, an' growled, an' rubbed his shins, an' says he, 'Clar', I declar' dat idea am jes' gittin' tru' my wool,' and I'm shuah you would a-thought he had fleas, de way he scratched his head, tryin' fur to make it out."

"I'm afraid you're prejudiced against Mrs. Parcell, auntie."

"I know I desarbe a whippin' for to be talkin' so 'bout your people, Miss Bryant; but I's got it in my head, and I can't no more git it out dan you can git out a cork dat's once got down in a bottle—so!"

The young wife, warm-hearted and innocent, was not at all affected by the admonitions of Auntie Clare. She thought Nettie very much improved, taking more trouble to please, and being less sarcastic than ever before. She enjoyed her society, in Luke's absence; altogether, as time wore on into midsummer, it sped faster, for the waiting wife could begin to see the end of the long absence, distant, but not interminable. About this time, also, she made an excellent sale of a piece of land, which Luke had desired her to dispose of, if opportunity should occur. An eastern gentleman coming to New Bristol to settle, selected it as a fine site for a dwelling, and paid her five hundred dollars in cash for it. The payment was made partly in specie, partly in bank-notes of various descriptions.

"If you are going to lay that money aside," said Nettie, "I would get it changed into gold, which will be safer, in case of banks failing, or fire."

"I believe I will, Nettie; I don't like to deposit it in these unsafe times. I've enough, without touching this, to last me until Luke returns. I ought to be very careful about the gold, though, so much of that is counterfeit, lately. Mr. Brown told me yesterday he'd taken a five-dollar gold-piece which was filled; and that two or three merchants had been imposed on by the same coin. Some one has been through the village again, scattering these things. I should think the counterfeiters would be careful how they came around New Bristol after the lesson they were taught last winter."

"To be sure, you can't be too careful. I would have it tried before I took it."

Father Miller's advice agreeing with Annette's, Mrs. Bryant exchanged her notes for gold. There being no banks in the village, she went to the merchants. Mr. Brown did not happen to have so much on hand, and she had to apply to three different persons before she got it all, each one letting her have what he had by him.

"There," said Annette, when Mary had locked

the cash up in a little sewing-box, and that again in a bureau-drawer, "you've so much laid up in case of accidents. That will furnish your new house when you get it built."

Scarcely more than a week after this, Mrs. Parcell received a letter from her husband, asking her to join him in St. Louis, as he had finished up his Mississippi business.

"Well, Molly, I suppose I shall have to go. But as you are at the top of the mountain now, it won't take so long to go down the other side," referring to the fact that half the time of Luke's expected absence had passed.

"I shall miss you, Nettie; but if Mr. Parcell asks for you, I mustn't set up my rights in the case."

"Well, take my advice, and be as jolly as possible. Get everything and go everywhere, as I do. Take your comfort while you are young. May be I shall see Luke before you do, if we return to New Orleans, though I don't intend to go there before frost. Parcell is acclimated; but I'm not. I'll bring Parcell with me next time I come, so that you can see he's not so bad as you think he is."

"Who said we thought he was bad?" asked Mary, blushing with consciousness of the truth of the accusation.

"Oh, it isn't necessary to deny it. You need not blush; I'm not sensitive about it. Of course he's not such a paragon as Luke; I shouldn't fancy him if he was! Parcell and I don't set up for perfection, like some people."

"I'm sure we don't, Nettie, so don't begin with your sarcasms. If you have married a good man, who loves you, nobody in the world, except yourself, can be so glad of it as I am," and Mary's arms went about her sister's neck.

Nettie's eyes fell before the loving look that met them; she shrunk a very little from the kiss offered; then rallied and returned it with seeming equal warmth.

Father Miller had never had any influence over Annette, and her step-mother she used to treat with cool neglect, but she had been so different during this last visit that they, too, were sorry to see her go away. She had bought several little luxuries, in the way of china and furniture, for their home, and had promised to share with the Bryants, in the duty of providing for them in their old days, should their own means prove insufficient. Altogether, Annette won golden opinions on every side, at home and abroad, vanishing in quite a little blaze of glory, leaving a trail of light behind her.

Auntie Clare alone never changed her mind, being not the least bit conciliated by the half-dozen real bandana handkerchiefs which Annette was gracious enough to present her on the day of her departure.

When Mrs. Parcell had been gone nearly a month, two things occurred which rather surprised Mary. In the first place she received, by a St. Louis boat, an immense box, which, upon being opened, was found to contain a handsome piano. Now, Mary could not play, and had no expectation of learning; neither could she conceive of any friend who would make her so expensive a present. She concluded that there must be some mistake; that the instrument must have been intended for some other person.

No, there was the direction, full and plain. The box had come from New York City. The thought that perhaps Luke—who was very fond of music, and had several times spoken of getting a piano if she would learn to use it—had arrived, unexpectedly, by way of New York, and might be now on his way home, set her heart beating rapidly.

She continued to fancy this to be the case for a couple of days, when a letter from her husband, post-marked Liverpool, and speaking, rather, of being compelled to stay a month longer than he had expected, proved the fallacy of the hope, and keenly disappointed her. There was nothing to do but to set up the piano, and await the explanation of the mistake, if it should prove to be a mistake. There were but two other pianos in New Bristol, and the arrival of this one was the subject of considerable talk. All Mary's friends came to see it, and to wonder who sent it, along with its recipient, who wondered the most of any. Sometimes she thought it might be Annette; still, her sister, though having plenty of spending-money, could hardly afford a present like this. Besides, she would have written to her about it. A few days after this came a small trunk containing an infant's wardrobe, very complete, and of expensive material.

Mary had a secret which she had kept from Luke in order to give him the sweeter surprise when he should come home. She had found it out shortly after his departure, but had never referred to it in her letters. Whoever sent her this box of tiny apparel must have been aware of this precious secret.

No one but Annette could have sent this little gift! Mary wrote to her, at St. Louis, to inquire, and received an answer denying any knowledge of either affair. Mary, more puzzled than ever, in vain tried to unravel the little mystery.

She now received another letter from her husband, directing her, if a certain village lot, which he had so often spoken of as the spot on which he should like to build his store, was still vacant, to purchase it, and to pay for it out of the means she had on hand, as he had prospered well with his affairs, and would like to begin building as soon as he got home.

Mrs. Bryant, finding the lot unsold, at once purchased it, paying the purchase-money down, three hundred dollars in gold, out of the fund laid away in the little saving-box. As she sat, that evening, in the door, looking off at the river and the sunset, as on the occasion when we first saw her, she had seldom in her life felt more peacefully happy. Their prospects were so flattering, everything conspiring to prosper them; the hope of Luke's speedy return so full of joy, the thought of his amazement and delight when she should betray to him her secret, so sweet; that as she sat and mused, with lovely, radiant face, thanking God in her heart, silently, she was more beautiful than ever.

The only shadow on her thoughts was the fear that Luke might be detained another month, as he had said was possible.

"What a lovely day this has been," she said, as her father came and sat on the steps in front of her.

"Yes, but it's a weather-breeder, child. We'll have a storm soon. These hot, bright days are sure to bring thunder."

CHAPTER IV.

THE THUNDERBOLT FROM A CLEAR SKY.

IN the morning the storm broke—sudden, swift, overwhelming—a tempest, leaping out of the very sunshine—not a cloud, not a note of warning—all was peace, when the bolt struck, and one happy home was in ruins.

When Mr. Miller arose, he saw no promise of the rain he had predicted; the sky was clear, the grass glittering with dew. Auntie Clara had prepared a choice breakfast; for, as Mary's health grew more delicate, no dainty could be too much trouble to prepare for her. Mary, in a white wrapper, with a pink ribbon in her hair, came forth to the table, as fresh and neat as if Luke's admiring eye were upon her. The family had nearly finished their meal when two men appeared at the open door.

"Good-mornin', neighbors, good-mornin'. Had your breakfast? Won't you step in and take a cup of coffee? Haven't any writ to serve on us, have you, sheriff?" said kind old Mr. Miller, laughing at his own joke. He was the last man in the world to be afraid of a sheriff, for he owed no man a dollar, and his conscience was as clear of stain as a spotless mirror.

The men looked embarrassed. They came in; but refused the coffee, and an invitation to be seated.

"Fine weather for the corn," continued the host.

"'Tis, 'tis—fine weather. Go on with your breakfast, Mrs. Bryant; don't mind us."

"Oh, I've finished," said Mary, with one of her childlike smiles, as she pushed back her chair, remaining seated through a diffidence very pretty in a young wife.

"Hum!" continued the sheriff, drawing a paper from his pocket, and walking slowly over toward her, where she sat. "I'm sorry for you, neighbor Miller—I am, indeed—and for your wife; but, the fact is, my duty requires me to arrest your daughter, Mary Bryant, for passing counterfeit money."

Mary turned a shade paler, but smiled still, thinking Mr. Purdy was growing rather coarse in his jests.

"'Tain't no joke, ma'am, as you'll find to your cost, I'm afraid. People are sick of this kind of work, and they've made up their minds to put a stop to it, no matter whose fingers get pinched."

He spoke rudely, betraying his own belief in her guilt, to the young creature, who had arisen to her feet, and stood looking at him with wide-open, incredulous eyes.

"What you talkin' about, sheriff?" screamed Mrs. Miller, darting in between him and Mary, as if her mother's love were stronger than the strong arm of the law. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself, when you see what her health is, comin' here and givin' her such a fright?"

"I mean just what I say, Mrs. Miller. I'm sorry for you, for I don't suppose you're implicated in it; but Mrs. Bryant has been passing counterfeit money, and she's got to suffer the penalty—that is, if she's convicted. We shall give her a fair trial, certain. Nothing shall be

done out o' the course of the law, though some of the citizens are greatly excited."

"Who says I have passed counterfeit money?"

Mary looked angry and resentful, rather than frightened; she by no means realized the danger of her position.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars of the three hundred you paid Jordan yesterday was filled. Very cleverly done, or it wouldn't have taken him in, even for an hour."

"I took that gold of Mr. Brown and two other merchants, as I can prove; I locked it up the day I received it, and never touched it since until yesterday."

"They remember very well that you exchanged notes for gold; but, unfortunately for your case, not *that kind* of gold that you paid for your lot. There's other cases known of your passing counterfeit bills, in small sums; but I'm not here to try you; the court 'll do that. I've a search-warrant to search the premises."

Mr. Miller lifted up his clinched hand as if to strike down the sheriff, but his daughter interposed.

"Hold, father, dear father! you will only make matters worse for me! Why should we object to his searching the house, since we are innocent?" And taking the keys of her bureau and boxes from her pocket, she handed them to Mr. Purdy.

Mrs. Miller sat down, for she was too faint to stand; but Mary remained proudly erect, watching the proceedings.

Her little treasure-box was soon found and opened. Upon applying the test to the remaining portion of the five hundred dollars, the greater part of it was found to be "filled," the same as that which she had yesterday paid out. In her purse was a five-dollar counterfeit on a Cincinnati bank. The officers were rigid in the performance of their duty. They even ascended into the loft, which was only used as a place of storage, and reached by a step-ladder. They expected, perhaps, to find some evidence that counterfeit coin had been manufactured on the premises. At last, in the bottom of a keg full of hops, which had been gathered the year before, and stood there, dusty and dry, they discovered some dies for stamping "quarters" and "halves."

That was all—and enough. The glance they gave Mary when they came down showed their pitiless belief in her criminality. The finding of the dies rendered it proper to have Mr. Miller also placed under arrest, but as yet they had no warrant for so doing.

Aunt Clare, by this time aware of what was going on, rushed into the room, shaking her fist in the sheriff's face, and daring him to lay a finger on her young mistress. This championship did poor Mrs. Bryant no good, irritating the officers, and causing them to be less considerate in their orders to her to get her shawl and bonnet and go with them to the county jail.

"Get a buggy! get a boss and buggy, I tells ye! You can't be so mean as to take a lady through the streets on foot, fer de boys to be runnin' arter. Sheriff Purdy, may de Lord drag yer darter in de mud, if ye hain't heart enough fer dat."

"I've no objections to getting a buggy, if

Clark 'll wait and guard the prisoner," said the sheriff, a little moved by the old servant's frantic vehemence.

Half an hour later, Mary Bryant, the pride of the village, passed out of her mother's door, a prisoner in the hands of justice.

"Don't yer fret, honey; don't yer fret one bit! Old Clare 'll take care o' yer till Massa Bryant get back. W'en he gets home, folks as has had a hand in dis, better look out! Dey'll be sorry eber dey played wid fire. Don't yer be cas' down, Miss Mary. De good Lord will reach down his han' to you."

The young wife had retained her self-possession remarkably; for the sake of her husband, for the sake of her child, she resolved to control herself, so as to let this cruel episode do her as little injury as possible; but, when Clare spoke of the protection which Massa Bryant would afford her, the thought of the outrage she was suffering, and he so far away, for a few moments overcame her. She burst into tears; but not for long. Before the carriage reached the jail, she was as firm and quiet as before.

Mr. Miller went with his daughter; but was not allowed to return. Although few really supposed him to be a party to the crime, it was thought best to hold him for trial.

Thus it was that the storm broke on that bright morning, shattering one hearth-stone, while touching no other in that village.

It may appear almost incredible to many readers that a person like Mrs. Bryant, so universal a favorite, so young and innocent looking, living in their midst so quietly, could find any to believe in her guilt. They might fancy that an indignant populace would storm the walls of her prison, to set her free, and proclaim her innocence. Instead of such being the case, the opposite feeling prevailed. The very unlikelihood of her guilt made people the more eager to believe it. Then, also, to do the inhabitants of New Bristol justice, it must be confessed that they had been long and sorely tried. Many things occurred, as days passed by, and the matter was discussed from every possible point of view, to strengthen the growing assurance of her guilt.

Her extravagance in buying new clothes was commented on. Where did the money come from? Everybody knew that Luke Bryant had lost a good deal, and that his wife *ought* to be exercising economy. Then, there was the story of the piano, and the trunk of clothing! It was now as plain as day that Mrs. Bryant had herself sent for these things; but to blind people to the fact of her spending money so freely, had affected not to know where they came from. In support of this supposition, some one wrote to the firm from whose warehouse the instrument had been sent, asking for the order which had been given them, if it was still in existence, as it was desired to be used in a court of law. Unfortunately for her, the letter had been filed, and was, when it was sent back in accordance with the request, found to be in Mary's handwriting, and to have been mailed from New Bristol. When this fact was noised through the town, nearly every one of the few friends who had remained true to the prisoner forsook their allegiance,

When her counsel heard of it, he at once visited his client to hear what her explanation of the affair would be. He was a young man from St. Louis, who had been settled in New Bristol but a short time, but who had quite a reputation for talent in pleading. He had undertaken the case with a full conviction that Mrs. Bryant was the victim of some combination of circumstances, perhaps of a conspiracy gotten up by other members of the band who were so severely dealt with, and whose quarters had been discovered through the aid of her servant and the energy of her husband. This appeared to him the only theory upon which to base a defense; he spent his ingenuity in efforts to find matter in support of this line of argument. He had, thus far, obtained no clew.

When her lawyer went in, Mary was sitting by the window, embroidering a little dress. She looked so pale and sad, and yet wore such a pure, elevated expression, that he was touched to tears. Old Auntie Clare sat at her mistress's feet, knitting. Nothing could keep her from her duty at that post. In consideration of the prisoner's health, she had been given the best room in the jail, an upper room with good light and air, which the negress had furnished with articles brought from home. Mary's own bed and chair were there, the floor was carpeted, and she was allowed her sewing implements. Auntie cooked all her food, waiting upon her as if she were "the lady of the land."

The lawyer told her about the piano affair; how the order was found to be in her handwriting, and asked an explanation.

"Mr. Harding, I have no explanation to give. I never ordered it, never paid for it, and have no idea why it was sent to me. I would like to see the letter. It is impossible that it should be in my handwriting, because I never wrote it."

"It would be best to have perfect confidence in me," he said with some embarrassment, for it was not an easy thing to hint to the woman before him that she was telling a falsehood.

"Do you, too, doubt me, Mr. Harding?" asked the prisoner, looking him straight in the eyes. "If you do, it will be best for you to abandon the case. I ask no one to defend me who cannot do it with a clear conscience. If all my friends fail me, I will be my own defender."

"I don't doubt you, Mrs. Bryant; I can't, when I see and hear you—that's the truth of it; but the court calls for something more than faith—it wants facts. Either you are the most artful woman on the face of the earth, or else there is some plot against you, well laid, and, I warn you, very dangerous. Have you any enemies? any person or persons who would have an object in injuring you?"

"Not, as I have said before, unless some members of that band are seeking revenge in this manner. Even then I cannot conceive how they could have placed the dies in the garret, nor how they could have gained access to my sewing-box."

"Are you certain that your negro man is all right? Sometimes these blacks have more wit than we give them credit for."

"Wit 'nough to know who de'r friends is,"

put in Auntie Clare, before her mistress could reply. "Jupe would jes' die fer his young missus. I make no doubt if she were dead an' buried, he'd nebber gnaw anudder bore, but jes' stretch hisself on de groun', side de grave, and lie dar, and die, too."

"Who's Jupe? I was not talking about dogs," said the lawyer, who was usually very good-natured to auntie.

"He's my husban', I reckon, an' de berry nigger dat discovered dem counterfighters. Tell ye w'at it is, Lawyer Harding, niggers no business putting in de'r noise; but I specks and believes I knows who's Miss Bryant's enemy. I can't prove it, fer I nebber see'd nuffin', but it's my 'pression."

"Who?" was the eager response.

"Mrs. Bryant's own half-sister, an' I will say so, if you do take my head off for it, Miss Mary."

"Is this so?" he asked, turning to his client.

"No, sir. No one could be kinder or better to me than she. She is as innocent as I am. I don't know what put such a wild notion into Clare's head; but there it is, and I can't move her. She gives me unnecessary pain by such talk."

"I'll take my asservation of it," muttered auntie to herself.

Improbable as such a thing seemed, there being no more reason to think Mrs. Parcell capable of such crime than Mrs. Bryant, the very suggestion was enough to make Mr. Harding ponder it. The next opportunity which he obtained to talk alone with auntie, he asked her a hundred questions about Annette—her habits, her sayings and doings when home. What reason she had for thinking she hated her sister, etc., etc. Out of all Clare's "asservations," he could get no facts, nothing but that she'd seen Miss Nettie look at her sister with eyes like a rattlesnake, an assertion not of much weight before a jury. Yet, there was something of the utmost importance, could it be proved, viz., that Jupe had recognized Parcell among the men in the cave who were manufacturing money. But, how could he prove it? Jupe was a slave, and could not testify against a white man. Besides which, it was probable that Jupe was mistaken, as no Parcell was found the next night when the gang was arrested. Again, even were it Parcell, would not the fact tell strongly against the prisoner? It might implicate Parcell and his wife, but it would not free Mrs. Bryant. On the contrary, it would only increase the feeling against the whole family.

Old Mr. Miller, who was confined in a room near his daughter's, bore his circumstances bravely, thinking that a very few weeks would bring everything straight again.

Court sat the second week in September; but as Luke was expected home by the 20th or 25th, Mary was granted a brief delay, to await his arrival. Some persons grumbled at even this favor, so strong was the belief in her guilt.

Alas! all things went wrong for poor Mary. The day the court sat she received a letter from her husband, saying that he was obliged to remain another month, as he had feared. This cruel disappointment almost crushed out hope and life. To have to bear the ordeal alone, un-

der such circumstances, too, seemed to be impossible. Yet thus it was to be, and was.

Popular opinion now began to include Luke in its condemnation. It was suggested that he had gone off so as to have a plausible pretext for getting suddenly rich; and that now his wife was detected, he had concluded to remain where the hand of the law could not fall upon him. Future events afterward supported this theory until it became the settled conviction.

Mary, expecting Luke so soon, and thinking it less cruel to break the news to him personally, than by letter, had not, at first, written of the trouble which had befallen her. Now it was too late.

If Mr. or Mrs. Parcell had come to town, they would have been held on suspicion; but no one took a sufficiently active interest to ferret them out and arrest them. Mary wrote to her sister at St. Louis, but receiving no reply, concluded they were not there.

Mr. Harding, unknown to her, had taken a trip to that city, on purpose to make the acquaintance of the pair, thinking that he could decide whether it was best to compel their appearance, after seeing them; but they had left the place, and he obtained no trace of them.

CHAPTER V.

"AT THE BAR OF JUSTICE."

THERE never was so good a week for the New Bristol hotel-keepers, and the liquor-saloons, nor even for the makers of gingerbread, as the week of Mary Bryant's trial. People came from far and near, on foot, on horseback, in wagons, and by boat. Women had it to tell to their children for years afterward, who were so fortunate as to catch a glimpse of the young and beautiful prisoner. When she came into court, with her white, calm face, there were many who wondered how she could bear the excitement in her present state; who pitied her, even while they thought her guilty; and who were inclined to let her go unpunished. Mr. Miller sat by his daughter, also a prisoner under trial, but around him comparatively little interest centered.

When the testimony came all to be summed up, it was overwhelming. It seemed foolish to suppose that Mary could have had so large a sum of spurious coin, not knowing it to be such. Mr. Brown, the merchant, swore that twice during the summer, bank-bills given him by Mrs. Bryant had proved to be counterfeit; but that, supposing she had been imposed on, like others, and that she did not know them to be such, he had laid them away until Bryant should return, who, he had no doubt, would make them good to him. The bad note found in her purse was produced, and, more conclusive than all, the dies found in the loft. The matter of the piano was not allowed to sleep. The attorney for the State—who, though he really pitied the prisoner because she was young and a woman, could not resist the opportunity for making a telling case—dwelt upon the lady's extravagance, the many little luxuries she had suddenly indulged in, and the necessity for making an example of *somebody*.

Mr. Harding's plea was as eloquent as talent and feeling could render it. His heart was in the cause, and he defended his client with all the

skill of which he was capable, clinging to the one statement, that she was the victim of a conspiracy. He could not prove it, but he hoped and prayed that the Supreme Judge of all Judges, the wise Ruler of the Universe, would never permit so great a wrong to be done the innocent; if his client were falsely condemned, the time would come when the men in the jury-box, the judge on the bench, and the people who listened to him, would feel their hearts sink with remorse at thought of their unjust persecution of one so young, so tender, so little able to bear their harshness.

The result seemed certain from the first. No one expected the jury to be out long, and they were not. In half an hour after receiving their charge, they returned with a verdict of "GUILTY." Yet in all that multitude, many of whom had labored to bring about this result, and desired to see it—some of them were rough, hardened men from barges and scows and village taverns—not one was so brutal as to raise a shout of applause. Only one sound broke the silence, and that was the groan which came from the father's lips, as he turned and looked upon his daughter. He was acquitted, nothing having been proved against him, and it being the general inference that Mary and Luke were in league with a band, but that Miller had no knowledge of their doings.

Four years' imprisonment in the State Penitentiary was the sentence passed upon Mary by the judge. "Ten years," he said, "would have been the doom of any man who had committed a similar crime. But she was young, and he could not find it in his heart to withhold from her the inducement to do better; she was young, and a woman, and he made her sentence comparatively light."

She listened, like one in a dream, whispering to herself:

"If Luke were only here! if Luke were only here."

Before any one had recovered from the temporary silence which had fallen, there was a tumult at the door. Auntie Clare fought and scratched her way through the dense crowd until she found herself by the side of her young mistress, when she glared upon the crowd like an angry tigress, bereft of its young.

"Yer oughter be 'fraid to sleep in yer beds," she screamed, shaking her fist at the judge and jury, "sendin' a young creeter like that off to the State's Prison. If any of yous is fadders, yer blood oughter run cold in yer veins. Ye'r' all Sadducees and Pariphrase, as de Scripiter says—sheep in wolf's clothing, gwine about seekin' whom ye may devour. Dar ain't one in dis house—not one—man, woman or chile, dat's got a heart as pure as my young missis. An' here yer be, sendin' her 'way to prison; and her husband, w'at would gib his life to keep de leas' trouble 'way from her, is done and gone; and yer don't even wait for her to see him. Tell yer w'at, dar'll be some men 'round here dat'll find derself shot and killed w'en massa does come home! 'Let me 'lone," she cried, as the sheriff attempted to take her out, "let me 'lone, or I'll scratch yer eyes out. I'm gwine to stick to her, and de hot pinchers ob Satan hisself can't pull me 'way."

And stick to her she did. Mr. Harding wished to conduct his client to the carriage which was to take her back to jail; but Clare just lifted her young mistress in her stout arms and bore her out, as if she were a baby.

Nobody hooted or jeered. There was something in the devotion of the old negress too sublime for ridicule, even to the coarsest of the crowd, and something in the expression of Mary's face which restrained all rudeness, and which made witnesses, jury and judge go to their homes with an uneasy sense of having committed a wrong. Her persecutors had triumphed, but they felt no exultation in their victory. On the contrary, as is often the case, a revulsion of feeling took place in the condemned woman's favor, and there were many who said that she should have been pardoned, even if guilty, as it was not likely she would do anything of the kind again, and she was in no fit state to be dealt with severely.

She would not be in a condition to be sent to the penitentiary until the first of January, in the mean time being permitted every comfort in the jail which her friends were able to provide. As for Mr. Miller, he went home a broken-hearted man. His daughter, his hope and solace, his beautiful girl, of whom he was so fond, who had ever been so gentle and dutiful, to have been dragged through such excitements, with only suffering and disgrace before her, was a misery too great for him to bear. His health had been failing for a year or two; now it received a fatal shock; he took to his bed, and remained there, slowly fading away with a cureless consumption.

Mrs. Miller, never known as a person of much energy, bore her trouble with a sort of meek patience which robbed it of half its keenness. She would not give way, as her husband did, as long as Mary's health was such a source of anxiety; and Mary's child, too, would need all her care. That thought alone made her bear up with a fond parent's heroism. These were days that tried Auntie Clare's strength, as well as her fidelity. She had Mary to attend upon; or, when her mother wished to sit with her, then auntie went to the house and took charge of Mr. Miller, and straightened out the housework, which Jupe got into a tangle.

"While there is life there is hope." The whole family still clung to a hope. They did not believe that Mary would really be sent off to the State's Prison. When Luke came home, all would be made right. What especial miracle Luke could work they did not explain to themselves; they only felt that he loved his wife too well not to move heaven and earth to obtain her pardon. He would ferret out the guilty parties; he would go to the governor; it might be he would overthrow the jail; nothing seemed impossible when they thought of Luke. That he should live, and allow Mary to suffer any injustice, was not possible.

What to the rest of the family was so strong an assurance, was to the young wife almost the breath of life.

"It will only be a month, and Luke will be here," was the answer she gave to Clare's attempts at comfort, the first evening of her return to prison. "We will wait till Luke comes."

Day by day she counted the hours and moments.

"It's two weeks still, auntie! Oh, how long, how long!" Then, "It's a week, a whole week yet! I feel certain he will be here by next Saturday. I am sure I can be patient until then! I am patient, am I not, Clare? You will tell my husband how brave I have been."

The Saturday came, and Mary neither ate nor drank. Her grated window commanded a view of the river, and there, with her pale face resting against the iron bar, she sat and gazed, scarcely breathing, until the steamer arrived, discharged its mail and passengers, and passed on. Then gradually the light went out of the eager eyes, the red spot out of either cheek; for no lithe figure, whose every movement she knew so well, came up from the wharf toward Miller's cottage. She sent Clare down to the house to inquire; then to the office for a letter; but there was no passenger nor message. She would have to wait the arrival of another boat—three days!

Jupe was down on the river every moment he could spare. It seemed as if he, too, like his young mistress, imagined that Mr. Bryant might be in every sail-boat, row-boat, or scow which appeared on the river.

But Luke Bryant did not come!

It gave the good people of New Bristol a great deal to talk about. They could surmise to their hearts' content, whether he had been shipwrecked, or was a party to his wife's guilt, and never intended to return. All the old women clicked their knitting needles, and nodded their heads faster as they wondered what a baby born in jail would be like; and if its father would not try to be back in season to welcome its advent. Many young matrons felt a generous sympathy for one who was once their friend and rival, the admiration of all, now about to bear a woman's greatest trial under circumstances so terrible. Many eyes besides Jupe's watched the steamers, and hoped to see the tall form of Luke Bryant the first to appear in the gangway.

But the days wore on, and there were no tidings.

It was a bleak, gray day, without color or warmth, the first of December. As still as a statue, and nearly as cold and white, Mary, as ever, sat in the window, straining her tear-dimmed sight, to make out any movement upon the river. An occasional snow-flake settled down into the water, or lodged on the duller earth. Far, far down the stream, a light cloud went up and mingled with the somber mist overhead. Mary knew it to be the smoke of an approaching steamer.

"Come, chile, Jupe's been out and brought down a quail, and here 'tis, br'iled right nice, I tell ye. Jupe's as good as ef he'd been trained to bring down birds. I tol' him ef he come back widout any, I'd give him a good ha'r-pullin'. I've br'iled it on a bit ob toas', and I want you to eat it while it's hot."

"Please, auntie, set it down on the stove a little while. I can't touch it until the boat gets in. She's coming now."

"Whar?"

"Don't you see the smoke down the river?"

"Your eyes is sharper dan mine, honey."

Specks you kin see de boat w'en it firs' leaves St. Louis, if practice makes perfeck. Come, now, you'll jus' hab nice time to eat yer dinner 'fore she gits in sight. Den you'll be strengthened up to meet Massa Bryant when he comes!"

Mary took the dish and made an attempt to partake, more to humor auntie's wishes than because she knew or cared what she was tasting; it was evident to the cook that it might as well have been a boiled chip, as a bird, as far as the partaker's appetite was concerned. After tasting a few mouthfuls, the plate was pushed away and the wife's watch was resumed.

"I can see the boat quite plainly now, auntie. But Luke is not on it, I know. I have a strange feeling about my heart. I feel as if I were dying, in a lonely place, with no one near me. Can't you give me a drink of water?"

"Don't talk so, an' don't look so. Massa Bryant will feel dreffe to see you lookin' so white. I'm mos' sart'in sure he'll be on dis boat. You oughter hab on your pink delaine wrapper, an' suthin' purty in your hair."

"I've suffered, auntie, and I'm willing he should see it. But he is not on the boat, I tell you. Auntie, auntie! oh, what a long month this has been! I wonder if it's possible that all the rest of my life will be like this past month!—every moment a day!—waiting, waiting, in solitude, in prison!"

"Then said she, 'I am very dreary,
He will not come,' she said;
She wept, 'I am aweary, aweary,
Oh, God, that I were dead!'"

"What makes yer talk so, dis time, honey? See! dar's de steamer turnin' in, and dar's Jupe on de shore."

Old auntie herself became now so absorbed that she ceased even to chatter; the steamer slowly gained her dock; Clare kept her eyes on Jupe, who, she knew, would give the signal if the anxiously-expected passenger was on board.

But Jupe did not give the signal; on the contrary, he walked up toward the jail with a lagging gait which plainly told of disappointment. Presently he was saying through the keyhole:

"Massa Bryant no come to-day, missus."

"Ask him to go to the post-office, auntie."

"Jupe, you trot off to de pos'-office, right smart, now! Don't yer dar' come a-whinin' roun' back, widout no letter."

Mary leaned back against the casement, with her eyes closed, and a pallor and weariness upon her worn young face which Clare had never seen there before. She did not speak or stir until the key rattled in the lock, and the jailer came in with a letter.

"I think it's Bryant's handwriting, and it's post-marked New Orleans," he said, as he handed it to Mrs. Bryant, and then had the delicacy to immediately retire.

A low cry of joy broke from Mary's lips, as she grasped the letter, and scanned its direction. It was Luke's handwriting, and it was sent from New Orleans. In that moment, all the trouble which had crushed her seemed but a feather's weight. Breaking the seal, and drawing forth the note, she read:

"MARY:—I have heard of your criminal conduct and arrest. I feel that I cannot return to the neighborhood of my old friends to live under the shadow

of the disgrace which you have brought upon me. My passage is taken for California, a wild country, said to be ablaze with gold; but it cannot be wild enough to suit me. I am a ruined man—ruined by the woman I loved and trusted. I was warned before my marriage, but I did not heed the warning.

"I shall not, at present, seek a divorce, though I might do so, under the law; but you must never expect to hear from me nor see me again. May fate be kinder to you than you have been to me."

"LUKE BRYANT."

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRISON FLOWER.

LIKE a flower blooming in the midst of Alpine snows, Mary's child first saw the light through prison-bars—a boy, healthy, perfect, beautiful, as though no terrible surprise, no lingering suspense, no final agony of a broken heart, had tortured his mother for months, to end in long unconsciousness and a fearful after-struggle for life. Under such miserable circumstances as waited on the child, it might seem as if it had been better that he had never been born; but, he was the savior of his mother from utter despair—perhaps insanity. The love which her husband had thrown back to her, found an object in their babe.

But, as one young life came in, the feeble flame of an older light went out. Mr. Miller was unable to rally after hearing of the cruel letter which his daughter had received, and of the critical condition in which she lay. He died when the baby was a few days old, having never seen his little grandchild.

The first of January was drawing near, and it became necessary for Mrs. Miller to decide upon some course of action. If able, Mary would then have to set forth on her journey to the State's Prison in Jefferson City. Mrs. Miller resolved to sell her little place, and take up her residence in the capital, where she not only could visit her daughter, but also take charge of the infant.

It seemed as if every trial which could wring a woman's heart must be meted out to Mary. She was not even to be permitted to nourish and care for that child she so passionately loved. Even if she could have cared properly for it, in prison, she would not injure it by confinement to the close and damp air.

Feeble as she was, and obliged to perform the journey by stage, yet the change was beneficial to the prisoner. What one so sensitive and modest suffered, only her own poor heart knew; but when the time came, she found herself enrolled in the band of inmates in the Penitentiary, doing her daily tasks with brutal women. Here, as everywhere, her beautiful, sad face won her many indulgences; she was allowed a bed and cell to herself, some little comforts of furniture, and to receive, once a day, a visit from her child, carried in Clare's faithful arms.

If Clare's loving energies had been put to the test hitherto, they were now doubly taxed. Mrs. Bryant had little means, as, of course, she had lost all of the five hundred dollars which was counterfeit, and much of what remained had been already spent. The sale of Mrs. Miller's homestead brought a little sum; but this Clare insisted should be placed in bank to draw interest, and to be taken from only in case of neces-

sity. As soon as the little family was settled in the humble place which they had rented, she set herself to earning a living for it, by taking in washing and ironing. She did this work beautifully, and soon had a run of customers; but she never was so busy but that she had time to cook some delicate article of food, to dress little Luke "within an inch of his life," and take him to spend an hour at the "nooning" with his mother.

The boy waxed in beauty and grace, so that wardens, matrons, prisoners, every one about the gloomy building, watched for a glimpse of the cherub child.

Although Mary never referred to her story, a belief grew in the prison that she was innocent. Every one, from the highest officer down to the basest convict, treated her with reverence. The labor to which she was put was that of binding shoes. The lightest was always selected for her. She worked as a machine might, rapidly and well, without any interest in what she was doing. With the long lashes drooping almost to her cheeks, seldom glancing up, never speaking unless spoken to, she sat at her humble toil. The rosy bloom for which she once was so famous had vanished with her happiness. That glorious wealth of hair, which had been Luke's pride, was cut off, most humiliating sign of her position!

But what was such degradation now? There was nothing which she could suffer since she received *that* letter. In her whiteness and silentness she shone within those dreary walls like a lily growing in the gloom of a cellar. The penitentiary scissors could not prevent her hair from curling into a thousand soft brown rings, which gave her a childlike beauty.

When her boy came, her countenance lighted up into a melancholy rapture. Little laughing, leaping, crowing child. *He* felt not the shadow of disgrace! The women all knew when he cut a tooth, and once, when he was sick with some baby-ailment, and not able to be taken out for three days, the whole prison was in mourning.

Ah! what a picture for some painter, when old Clare brought in her ebon arms the lovely child to his imprisoned mother!

Luke! that was the magic name by which all hearts were stirred. For his mother had called him after his father.

"The child is his. He has a right to his father's name. He has disowned me, but he can not disown his child," was what she said, when, at his humble christening in the Bristol jail, she was asked what the infant's name should be.

In the mean time, what had become of Jupe? Jupe was a slave, and not free to follow the dictates of his heart. Many and anxious had been the consultations between him and his wife before the family left its Bristol home. The broken pitcher was produced from its hiding-place beneath a stone in the cellar, and its contents counted again and again, as if the counting would increase the sum. Including the three hundred dollars reward which Jupe had received for discovering the counterfeiters, there were five hundred dollars in that bank. The couple had already calculated, that, as they grew older, their value would lessen, so that when they got quite broken down and rheumatic, they could

buy the privilege of taking care of themselves for a small sum. That time, however, had not yet come. Jupe, though not over fifty, was prized on account of the unusual share of sagacity and invention which he possessed. Doubtless, five hundred dollars would be the least his owner would take for him.

Touched by compassion for Mrs. Bryant, and trusting implicitly in auntie's promise that she would remit her hire to him every month, their master had consented to her accompanying the little family to Jefferson City. But, as to Jupe's going, he was not inclined to consent to it. Jupe might run away, and anyhow he was short of hands, and wanted him at home early in the spring. Jupe would not prevent Clare's going; indeed he highly approved of it.

As to the consultation over the money in the broken pitcher, there was a secret in it which was not breathed to Mary or Mrs. Miller.

"Yah, Jupe, dat's jes' it. You keep it hid till de time come, den you buys yer freedom, an' sets out on de scent. An' min' I tell you, Jupe, don' ye *nebbber* gib up, *nebbber* no mor'n a bloodhoun' w'at is runnin' down poor nigger! Do ye keep de track till ye fotch um, and w'en ye gits um, do ye jes' hol' 'em and worry 'em, till you gits de hull story. Min' if ye come back widout, I'll *nebbber* hab nuffin' to do wid you ag'in. You needn't fret 'bout us. We'll get along fus' rate. I'll take car' Miss Miller, Miss Mary, and de baby, so long as de Lord keeps my j'int's 'iled, so's my legs and arms wull work widout creakin'. Now, Jupe, can I trus' you wid dat pitcher?"

"You kin, Clar'. I'll dig a hole under dat big stump in de edge o' master's medder, and I'll bury it dar on a dark night, w'en nobody's a-looking. Ef I should die sudding you'll know whar 'tis. 'Arly in March I'll buy off, and set out on dat journey. It's like I'll come tru Jefferson and gib you a call."

"I shall be right glad to see you dar, husban', ef yer on yer way tow'd de conflagration ob your plan. But don' ye come whinin' and sneak-in' round, sayin' ye can't do it. I reckon, Jupe, I'd better help you bury dat pitcher 'fore I go. An' min'! don't ye be sech a fool as to go dar ebery little while to look at it. Kase if yer does, somebody'll be sartain to git on yer track, and dat ar' pitcher will be resurrected w'en you ain't expectin' it."

"Lors, Clar', t'ink I's a fool?"

"Woll, not more'n two-thirds, p'raps, or I wouldn't trus' ye out wid de pitcher at all. But, you jis' be keerful. Dar's no harm in bein' keerful."

"Don' ye fret, Clar', I'll do jis' as I said. Oh, wife, don' I wish I could write! I mean to learn right away, and send a letter to Californy. I don' want to git nobody to write it fer me, kase they'd know what was in it."

"You write!" exclaimed auntie with withering contempt. "W'at you t'ink your paws is good fer? "'Sides, de letter would get los'. You mus' *find* him, and tell him by word o' mouf. So! Oh, dear! Woll, husban', remember ebery day los' makes her so much longer to suffer. Now do you be 'wise as a sarpint and harmless as a dog,' Jupe, 'cause you've got a great trus' dependin' on you. 'To whom much is gib'n more will be spected,' and I's gib'n all

my share in dat money. Now you keep a right smart watch on de pitcher, will ye?"

For the hundredth time Jupe promised, and when auntie was really gone on her sad journey, when strangers were in the little cottage and Jupe back on his master's farm, he kept his word with all the cunning discretion of his race. In February he proposed to his master to buy his freedom, who was not as much surprised, since it was known that the man had the three hundred dollars which he had received of the Vigilance Committee. His master consented, and was even so liberal as not to take the last of the hard-earned silver dollars which came rolling out of the broken pitcher, making his old and faithful servant a present of twenty-five of them.

A few days later Jupe disappeared from that vicinity, and it was long before the haunts of New Bristol again became familiar to his sight.

CHAPTER VII.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES IN A NEW PLACE.

IN the winter of eighteen forty-nine-fifty, on a wretched, rainy evening, a man walked down the center of Washington street, San Francisco, (for it was not safe in those days to approach too closely the shadows of buildings, or the alleyways from which assassins might at any moment spring upon you) until he came opposite Washington Hall, when he wheeled and came into that favorite haunt of pleasure and dissipation. He seemed to have no acquaintance, and to have nothing particular in view. He did not approach the bar to drink, nor go up-stairs to the dancing hall, but lingered near a group of citizens, who were talking over the contents of the last mail and the news from the States. When they had finished their conversation and scattered to different parts of the room, he advanced to a monte-table, and watched the gambling, but did not join in the play. He wore the dress of a miner, and was armed, as was every body in that dangerous haunt, there being the hilt of a knife visible in his belt, and, no doubt, a revolver concealed in his bosom.

Presently a man came down from the ball-room, jauntily dressed, and with a graceful nonchalance watched the game for a few moments before he concluded to join with others in "sizing their piles" for the next deal.

"Hallo, Parcell, you ain't out o' sorts to-night?" said the dealer, condescending to address this last person, with whom he appeared to have a familiar acquaintance. "Come, pungalee down, and don't hang fire that way. You ain't dead-broke again, are you?"

"Not exactly," replied the other, drawing from his pocket a small "pile of dust," marked three ounces.

"Come, gentlemen, don't be back'ard—size your piles—king, seven, nine, horse;" laying out the cards on the green baize.

"Look here, Parcell, if you have really got money there, I beg of you not to throw it away in that manner," spoke the first stranger in a low voice, laying his hand on the arm of the other. "I saw Annette this evening. She is sick in bed, and could not finish her day's work. She says she will have to move out of the shanty to-morrow, if the rent is not paid."

"Let her move, then," was the reply, in a tone equally low, but sharp and angry, "or you pay the rent for her if you prefer."

"For shame, Parcell! Do you wish to drive your wife to desperation by your neglect of her? Remember the temptation of this place. She, too, may be led astray, as well as yourself."

"I don't think she'll do worse than yours has," was the rejoinder, with a laugh that was full of malice. "Come, now, don't preach, Bryant," he added, in a modified tone, seeing the manner in which the hand of his companion went involuntarily toward his belt. "I'm bound to take care of Annette. That's what I'm here at this table for. I sha'n't leave it until I've doubled my money, at least; then, to-morrow, I can pay the rent, and get Nettie some little luxuries besides."

Parcell kept his word. He was in luck that night. He not only doubled but quadrupled his three ounces.

"Come away now, Parcell, and I will see you safe home. Some of these hungry eyes may keep track of you, with all that dust in your pockets."

All this while Luke Bryant had stood by, watching the throng, and waiting for Parcell to finish his night's work. Now, wearied with standing and thinking of the sick woman alone in her wretched shanty, he touched the gambler on the sleeve as he spoke.

"There's some truth in that, old fellow, and I sha'n't refuse your company. Mrs. Parcell sick you say? Wait a moment, till I see if John's got a few of those oysters left. If he has, I'll take her some," and he went off to the bar, presently returning with a can of oysters, for which, doubtless, he paid an extraordinary price.

"Dollar apiece, these bivalves were," he continued, as they started forth into the rain and darkness, their hands on their weapons, and keeping, as usual, to the middle of the street, walking perhaps half a mile before they came to the place of shelter which was called home.

"Here we are," said Parcell; "come in and spend the night. It's not far from morning now, I dare say. It will be dangerous for you to return alone to the Parker House at this hour."

"I'm not afraid. Good-night, Parcell. Take better care of your wife."

"Oh, you needn't talk," muttered Parcell, as he pushed away the board which formed the door of his shanty, and went in, while Luke strode back to his hotel.

"Is that you?" inquired a sharp voice at the noise he made in entering.

"Yes, it's me! Got any matches, or any fire? Bryant says you're sick."

"Well, I'm afraid I am down at last. I got up though, after he was here, and tried to finish my ironing. I guess there are still a few coals in the kettle."

Parcell obtained a match out of his vest pocket, and lighted a candle which stood by the bed.

"I thought if there was fire enough, I would cook you a dish of oysters, Nettie, my love."

"Oh, dear," said the sick woman, rising eagerly in bed, "I wish you would, Parcell, I hain't eaten a morsel to-day, and I guess it's that, more'n any thing else, that ails me."

"Why didn't you eat, my dear?"

"You know you carried off all the money I took in last week, Parcell. I hadn't enough left to last until I receive more. You know provisions are fearfully high."

"Gracious! girl, I had no intention of starving you. I thought ten dollars a dozen for washing would keep you and me too," and he stirred the oysters around violently in the old tin cup, which he had set over the few coals remaining in the kettle, which kettle had been improvised for a furnace to iron by.

He cooked the dish to perfection, and as he set it before his wife, gave her a kiss, which she did not return, but rather seemed to shrink from.

Parcell loved his wife. It was the one saving trait in a character otherwise thoroughly debased. A gambler by profession, and guilty of crimes which would have placed him in the hands of the law, had he been detected in them, he was yet deeply infatuated with the girl he had married.

It was at her instigation that they had come to California, the preceding spring. As she said, he would be out of the reach of any unpleasant consequences arising from certain acts of his not yet made public; besides which, San Francisco would be the very place, better even than New Orleans, for a person of *his profession* to do well in.

Certainly, a professional gambler would not find himself astray in that curious city. Annette, with her peculiar temperament, enjoyed the novelty of this strange life very greatly for a few months. But, the life of a gambler is subject to ups and downs. There came a run of ill-luck, when they had to leave the Parker House, and take up with a shelter, half canvas, half boards; and where Annette, with all her dislike for exertion, had occasionally to take in washing to purchase the wherewithal to keep herself from suffering.

But, she lived in hope. The man who was penniless one night, might count his hundreds the next. At this time, when we have introduced them to the reader, they were at the lowest ebb of fortune. Parcell had been off to other places, and out among the diggers. He may have made a great deal of money; if so, he had lost it all, and came back as he went. Then the rainy season had set in, and Annette grew exceedingly homesick and lonely. It may be that in these hours she thought of the happy little home of her father on the Missouri bluffs, and would have given all she had, or hoped to have, for the privilege of seeing it once again, as it was before misfortune entered it. Or, it may be, that such fancies never troubled her, for when the conscience is once put to sleep, it sometimes slumbers long without awakening.

"Why didn't Bryant come in and stay all night?" she asked, after she had tasted the stew.

"It's dangerous for him to be running about alone at this hour."

"I asked him, but he wouldn't. What was he here to-day for? I should think he could find something else to do besides visiting other men's houses in their absence!"

"Why, Parcell, he has just returned from the mines. It's strange if he can't call upon his own relatives," Nellie said, quickly, while her heart beat a little faster. With the cowardice of

guilt, she trembled lest her secret should be discovered. She did not love Parcell, and never had loved him; but, above all things, would she avoid having him suspect that she married him out of pique, while madly in love with another.

"Relative!" rejoined Parcell, with a sneer; "don't draw it quite so fine as that Nettie."

"Well, friend—if you like that better. I should think, in this wild country, you would be glad to see any face you had ever met before."

"I'm sick of his, any how, my lady," said the husband, with a decision unusual with him.

"He's too good to suit my taste. He's one of your perfect people, always holding themselves up as a mirror to show off other men's defects in. He won't do for California, I tell you."

"He seems to be getting along better than some who make their money easier. I was asking him about his affairs to-day. You know he brought out five thousand dollars with him. He invested it in a lot and in building a brick store upon it; and the property, this minute, is worth five times what it cost. He has twenty other city lots, and is part owner of a boat that runs between here and Sacramento. In a few days, he is going to buy shares in a valuable placer."

"Oh!" said Parcell with a shrug, "that comes of being of a business turn of genius. He makes a good deal, and sticks to it when he gets it. He'll be a millionaire, if he keeps on. Better get into his good graces, Nettie, and induce him to will his little property to us! Don't look as if he'd live long, if he don't quit moping about that affair in Missouri."

Annette gave her husband a curious look; but he did not notice it, as, just then, the candle flared in its socket and went out.

When the Parcells first came on to San Francisco they were not positive that Bryant was a resident of that city. All they knew of his whereabouts was, that he had told Annette he thought of going to California, and had sailed in a Panama steamer. After they reached their destination she kept up a constant lookout for him; and one day, when they had been at the hotel about three months, she saw him come in to dinner.

He was so hollow-cheeked and dull-eyed, with so wild a growth of hair and beard, and was so roughly habited in a miner's dress, that she had to look twice before being certain it was Luke. She found it out in time to school her face to perfect calmness, so that when he, glancing about, recognized them and came over to greet them, she could successfully hide from her husband and from him, the tumult in her heart. Since that day they had kept up a desultory acquaintance; Bryant was often out of the city weeks at a time, and when in it, did not care too much for the society of the Parcells; the man he had never liked, and Annette recalled to him too vividly scenes and sufferings which were unbearable even in memory.

The day following the evening which we have described, Annette put aside her work early in the afternoon, and dressed herself with all her old coquetry. Her finery was a little out of fashion, but no one in that country was a judge of that; silken robes and shining eyes received their full meed of admiration in a land where

women were as scarce as roses in a desert. She braided her splendid black hair, and wound it about her head like a coronet, twisting a scarlet velvet ribbon in the folds. A black silk dress, with a knot of scarlet velvet at her throat, was so becoming as to make her very nearly beautiful. The lady and her attire formed a strange contrast to the place in which she sat, with the bare floor and dripping walls, the furniture made of rough pine boxes, the strip of canvas which alone divided the bed from the one other apartment. Annette had made up her mind that Bryant would call again that day, to inquire after her health. In truth her illness of the previous day was more than half affected, to excite his compassion and cause him to do something to improve her fortunes. She resolved to complain to Luke of her husband, in the hope that he would reinstate her in the hotel where she would have company, and receive that admiration and attention without which she could not exist.

She was not mistaken in her expectation of receiving another call; Luke was really too kind to neglect a woman who had any claim, however slight, upon him, in that wild, lawless society. And Annette was Mary's sister! He should have hated her for that, have avoided her as the one who brought back to him most keenly the memory of that sweet, mocking episode in his life—that year of exquisite happiness including his engagement and marriage—when he loved and *trusted*; oh, he could not yet bear the thought of it! but set his teeth and clinched his hands as a flood of passion swelled and broke over heart and brain.

Yet he would not turn his footsteps away from Annette's door; she was probably alone, sick and friendless; for Parcell, although so fond of his wife, could not be depended upon to care for her properly—his dissipated habits prevented that.

Annette welcomed her visitor with a faint smile, suggestive of languor and loneliness, mingled with pleasure at seeing him.

Since a woman is not made to earn money, she is made to charm it out of men's pockets by a thousand graceful arts, as fathers and husbands can testify; and a woman as unprincipled as this one would not suffer for the want of it when she had a brother-in-law to whom she could appeal.

"I am glad to see you better to-day, Mrs. Parcell."

Luke had felt a reluctance to entering; he would rather, in his then mood, have staid out in the miserable six-weeks' rain, walking off, by sheer force of bodily fatigue, his haunting thoughts; but, once within the shanty, he could but feel the effect of Annette's handsome looks and tasteful attire, as if he had come suddenly upon warmth and sunshine.

"I am better, Luke. Indeed, I should be quite well if it would only quit raining. I am so tired of it—so tired! Oh! Luke! it will drive me mad, if it does not cease before long."

"Does it affect you so unpleasantly as that?"

"Why, only think of it! Shut up here like—like"—she was going to say a "prisoner," but the word faltered on her lips—"a dog in a kennel. Is this horrible hole as good as a kennel,

Luke?—sometimes not seeing a human face for two or three days, the rain dripping, dropping all the time, until it seems to be dropping on my brain. Is this the life for a woman like me to lead?"

"I am sorry you came out with Parcell, Nettie. This is not the place to induce him to do well; and surely not the place for you to struggle on alone, in case accident should deprive you of even his poor protection."

"Ah, Luke Bryant," she murmured, dropping her forehead on her hand, and heaving a sigh, "I had more than one motive in coming to California. I thought that Parcell might settle down into some steady employment, where there were so many chances of getting rich; but I also thought of *you*. I could not bear to think of you, alone, and suffering, in this new country. I thought, 'should he be sick, we can take care of him—we can prove to him that he has friends, and perhaps keep him from utter desperation.' You were a brother to me, Luke, and I could not cast you off in your hour of trouble."

"Thank you, Nettie."

She perceived, by his chilling tone, that she ventured too far in referring to his sorrows; his heart was still too sore to bear the slightest touch, and she hastened to add:

"I'm sure you take an equal interest in my affairs; so I don't mind telling you that Parcell is making me very unhappy. He likes that dreadful Washington Hall better than he does his wife. Don't you think he ought to take me out of this? I want to go back to the Parker House. It's bad enough there; but I shall *die* here," and she burst into tears.

"I don't wonder you feel wretchedly here, especially, this gloomy season. I am perfectly willing to help you, Annette, if I knew how to do it. But, if I loan money to your husband it will be lost at the monte-table, and do you no good."

"I know it, Luke. I don't wish you to lend money to *him*. But, oh, please to take me out of this shanty! If you will pay my board a few weeks at the hotel, I will get hold of money whenever Parcell has it, and will pay you back."

"I do not wish to be repaid. I have more than I shall ever need, Annette, and am willing you should use it as your own. But, Parcell must understand it and agree to it."

"Oh, as to that," she said, brightening up like a rainbow through showers, "he will not refuse you the privilege of supporting his wife. He has not sensibility enough for that."

"I am sorry you came out with him," Luke added, again. "I will tell you what I will do, Annette. I will pay your passage back to the States in the first ship that goes, and see that you are provided for after you get there. Go back to your parents, Nettie. They must need you sadly," his voice trembled, "and I will remit, every three months, a sum sufficient to keep you in comfort. This is no country for women, yet awhile."

An expression of scorn quivered about her mouth, as he mentioned home—as if she was going back to a humdrum life to be spent in waiting upon her father and mother! and that he should be so blind to her feeling for him, so ut-

terly indifferent to her, as to wish to get her out of his way, whom she had followed from afar, because she could not live apart from him! She was quite pale with anger, for a moment; she longed to stamp her foot, and fling his offer in his face; but, discretion came to her aid in time to prevent any such outbreak.

"You are very kind, Luke; but I have no ambition to live a grass-widow, even if my sense of duty as a wife would permit it. It is true that Parcell does not do right; but I mean to 'stick by him' until he reforms. He is always good to me, when he is himself; perhaps I may get power over him to induce him to settle down in some steady work," she said, when she had mastered herself. "Besides, brother Luke, I would like to stay near you"—this latter sentence with such softness, such humility—as if, being the relative of one who had wronged him so deeply, she would like to atone, by her own attentions, as far as possible, for the wrong that other had done him.

"Well, Annette, I have given you my advice, but if you decide differently, it may be for the best. Only remember, if you are in straits, let me know and I will befriend you."

"If I could get a decent house," continued Mrs. Parcell, "I would keep house, and board you. That would give me something to live upon, and might be the means of keeping Parcell more regular."

"I'm changing about so much you could hardly depend upon me. But I may build you a house in the spring and get other boarders for you; you could get rich at it, if you chose."

"In the mean time," said Annette, with a smile, "you don't intend to have me quite catch my death in this damp shanty."

"If your husband will take you to the hotel, you can go there any hour. I will speak to the proprietor about the pay."

"What's up?" inquired Parcell, who entered at the moment, eying the pair with suspicious eyes. "You don't fix up that way nowadays for me, my love. If you've put on all that finery to please Bryant, I must say you ain't acting the part of a devoted wife, my love. I don't like it, blamed if I do!"

Luke turned from him in disgust, seeing that he was considerably excited by drink, and not in a fit state to be reasoned with.

Annette laid her hand upon her husband's arm, saying coaxingly:

"He's offered to help us a little, until you get started again, my dear. He says he will pay my board, if you will take me out of this damp, dismal hole, where I am ruining my health."

"I guess you'll have to get out of it," said Parcell, with a boisterous laugh. "The owner will be here in less than an hour; so pack up your duds, wife. You see," turning to Luke, "I went out this morning to pay the rent, but I stepped in on the way to take a little bet at monte, and I got cleaned out. Fact; haven't got a pinch of dust left."

"I hope you will stay and see your wife safely to the Parker House, for I must be going. I will make it all right with the landlady," and bowing to Mrs. Parcell, Luke hastened away.

An hour afterward, Annette arrived at the hotel, Parcell wheeling the two trunks which contained their sole possessions upon a barrow to the door. The miserable shanty they had vacated was tenanted before night by a party of miners, glad to pay a round sum for this shelter from the weather, and who felt rich and comfortable over the kettle that was left behind.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MOUNTAIN REVELATION.

A MAN inclined to be bad would find plenty of encouragement in the California of early days; and Parcell was not an exception to the rule. He became known as one of the most inveterate gamblers of San Francisco. Some weeks he would be so flush of money that he could afford to scatter it everywhere, and his wife would have every luxury which the city afforded. Again, he would be so hard up that Bryant would have to come to the rescue by paying Annette's hotel bill.

As soon as the rainy season should be over, so that it was possible to attempt such an enterprise, Luke intended to start off on an exploring expedition in company with a band of miners. It was not the desire to find incredible amounts of gold which animated him; it was the sad hope of getting away from *himself*. The wilder the excitement, the greater the peril and hardships, the more absorbing the fatigue, the less would he be conscious of that sharp, steady pain in his heart which was wearing him to a skeleton—which was growing so intolerable that some days he resolved to end it by ending his life. This very carelessness of life it was which won him the reputation for extraordinary courage and coolness; dreading no danger, he thereby escaped much; for, not only did the reckless fellows by whom he was surrounded stand too much in awe of him to quarrel with or combine against him, but the very perils of a rough life seemed to lose their harshness when attacked by one who cared nothing for them.

The mining-expedition which he headed felt itself fortunate in possessing such a leader, and was anxious for the day of departure. Annette looked upon it with secret chagrin. She had the pain of feeling that all her delicate flatteries and attentions never won from Luke a second thought, and of seeing the hollows deepen in his cheeks and about his eyes, without the power to alleviate one pang of the melancholy which devoured him. She saw all this, yet never for a day did she give up her fixed purpose which was yet to bring this man to her feet.

Fate seemed to favor her unholy purpose. On the night preceding the day on which Bryant was to leave San Francisco for the mountains, Parcell got into a quarrel with a Spaniard, in the saloon where they were playing, and was stabbed to the heart by his fiery enemy. He was carried out lifeless from the scene of his last and fatal stake. Annette was aroused from her slumbers, and threw on a dressing-gown, only to confront the corpse of her husband as it was carried over the threshold into her room, and laid out upon the bed, from which she had just sprung.

A shock like this would be felt by the most

hardened. For a few days, Annette was quite stunned and bewildered, an object of interest and sympathy to all who knew of the young wife, left thus suddenly without a protector, in that city of sin. Luke delayed his departure until after the funeral; he then again advised her to return to the States, making the same offer as before. But, no! Annette refused to go, with a resolution which surprised him. "I can make my living here easier than there. If you will do as you once proposed, Luke—give me a chance to open a boarding-house."

"Well, wait until my return, then. You are not fit for it yet. Stay quietly in your room at the hotel; and when I get back I will see you started in a house of your own."

He went off, leaving her to foster wild hopes. She was free now—free to marry again; and if Luke were not, he could at any time render himself so. Luke was going to be rich, too—one of the richest men in California. Dazzling visions of the future opened before her—a life of ease and splendor passed in his society, for whom she had sold her soul to the Evil One.

She could have had suitors enough, ere she had been a widow two months, in that land destitute of the softer sex, for she was young, lady-like, and handsome; but as long as there was another hope of drawing Luke within her sphere, she would not give it up.

As Luke had advised, she kept herself very retired; her fellow-boarders pitied her, in her affliction; but, although there was mourning in her garments, there was none in her heart.

In the mean time, Luke was off to the mountains with his band. The spring torrents had washed down the gold in such quantities as to drive the men half wild. On a little plateau, beside a stream which tore its way out of the heart of a rugged hill, they pitched their tents, and set to work. All they had to do was to sift the sand which had accumulated through the winter, when they were rewarded, not only by "dust," but by frequent bits as big as tiny pebbles and with occasional "nuggets" that would have been unpleasant things to throw at each other's heads.

Bryant did not work very steadily at accumulating gold; he undertook to supply the others with game, to vary the salt pork, beans, and flour which were their food. With his rifle on his shoulder, and otherwise well armed, he did not hesitate to start forth alone in search for something for the night's supper. He wished to be alone. He shrunk from companionship, and in order to be alone, courted the wild life he was leading.

For many weeks the band remained in one spot. Twice or thrice a detachment from it went down to the city to exchange the "dust" for town-lots, as Luke advised, and to bring a fresh supply of provisions. Gradually the spring streams dwindled away, and the summer heats came on. The men were prosperous and content—at times inclined to quarrel, but easily influenced by Bryant into good behavior, who decided their disputes for them.

One day Luke got on the trail of a bear, which he followed for a long distance, quite down to a grassy valley which lay, like an emerald, glistening between two mountains. He did

not think of the distance, nor of the late hour, nor, in fact, of the bear itself. His thoughts were with the past, which was fortunate for his grizzly enemy, who quietly slipped away to parts unknown, while the young man slackened his long stride into a musing step, which finally ceased entirely.

He was standing alone in one of the loveliest valleys of that country of wild and beautiful scenes.

Luke thought himself far from mortal companionship; but, as his eye fell from the sky to the ground, he saw, beneath a tree, a few rods from him, some one sitting. Quite certain that the stranger was an Indian, he took his rifle in his hand, advancing cautiously as others might be near. The solitary tree and short grass, however, could hardly hide many enemies, and as something in the man's attitude told of fatigue or sickness, he went forward to ascertain if he was in need of assistance. He was quite close upon him before he discovered that the man was a negro, not an Indian. The two looked at each other some time before speaking; the negro's countenance was of that yellow hue which tells of sickness in one of his race, but it gradually brightened; he raised himself from the trunk of the tree against which he had been leaning, and slowly clasped his hands together, while his lips moved.

"Jupe! is this you?"

"Glory be to God, if dat's you, massa!"

"It is 'Massa Luke,' Jupe."

"You's changed, massa."

"And you, too, Jupe. You look as if you'd seen hard times. How in the name of every thing that is probable came you here, and alone? Where's your party?"

"I's my own party, massa. I's been two years gettin' here, but I's got here at las', bless de Lord!"

"So you, too, have the gold fever?" said Bryant, looking down with almost scorn on the old, wrinkled, wasted negro, whose hair had bleached, and whose bones had gained prominence since he saw him last. "Will gold ease your rheumatism, or be as good to you as Auntie Clare's company of an evening? What possessed you, Jupe?"

"De spirit ob de Lord, Massa Bryant. He's led me and kep' me tru' drestful hardships. 'Oh, Lord,' I prayed, 'don' nebber let me die till I come to massa,' und here I is, jes' as I was about to gib up in good 'arnest;" the sweat broke out on his forehead as he spoke, he was so weak.

"You're sick," said Luke.

"Hungry, massa, and sick, too, but I don't feel it now. All my aches and pains is over, now I see massa right afore my eyes."

Luke gave him some brandy from the flask in his pocket, also a cracker, the remains of his noon lunch.

"Do not try to talk just yet, Jupe. I'll help you to my shanty, and when you have had some supper and rested, I'll hear about your journey."

"It's been a turrible journey," groaned Jupe.

And it was not yet over. Luke was further from camp than he desired, as the old fellow clung to his arm, limping slowly along. However, they arrived there long after dark, when the men were about to set forth in search of

their captain. The negro was made welcome to a share of the supper, after which all gathered about a fire—built more for cheerfulness than because it was needed—to listen to an account of the stranger's trip to California. Jupe said not a word about his past acquaintance with Bryant, but told the story without referring to the object of his wanderings. He had "taken a notion to see Californy," and, as he had not money to pay for a passage by sea, he had hired out to a large party of men who started by the Overland route. When they had been out about three months, and were nearly across the plains, the emigrants had been attacked and massacred by a band of Indians; only Jupe escaped, and he by reason of his color. The Indians, like "the rest of mankind," were not averse to having a slave, and the poor negro was carried off into captivity, and made to work for his living as he had never worked before. It was pitiable, and laughable too, to hear him relate the hardships of his winter with the Indians, compelled to hunt game in the snow, to bring firewood, and himself left to shiver after it was brought.

The next summer he had made his escape, by following his captors when they set forth on another marauding expedition. In this way he had been enabled to warn a party of emigrants, in time to save their lives, who in return had taken him into their ranks; but this party was also unfortunate; losing their cattle by starvation, and getting out of food, its members were kept in the mountains through the winter, suffering terribly, dependent on their rifles for all the food they had, and lodged in a cave, with seldom any fire. In the spring they made their miserable way along, until overtaken by other emigrants who shared with them, and helped them on, but "ole Jupe was allers an unlucky nigger," and got lost again, about a week before, by going aside from the main party to chase a deer. Since then he had had no food, but roots and berries, and had slept, with no blanket, on the ground; he was about to perish from utter weakness, and had sat down to "giv' up de ghos'," when found and rescued by Mr. Bryant.

Such was a brief synopsis of his story; but who can picture all its details of weariness, fright, and ill-treatment, hunger, thirst, cold and sickness, alternate hope and despair, its thousand little miseries and larger sufferings, as the slow months lagged away, bringing poor Jupe no nearer the object of his sad pilgrimage? Yet he struggled on, determined to be true to his mission, only praying that he might live long enough to accomplish it.

That night the moon shone brilliantly. Jupe had been given a blanket in Bryant's tent, and was soon after sound asleep. But Luke could not sleep. The sight of his old servant had aroused memories which prevented rest. Jupe had been with him, that happy, blessed winter; had mingled in the family during that blissful era of its existence, and the meeting with him shook him as he had thought never again to be touched. Stealing out upon the grass, Luke sat there, staring up into the depths of heaven, while the moonlight made his unshorn face more haggard still. He started violently when some one spoke, close beside him. The negro had crept

out of the tent after him, and was looking anxiously into his worn countenance.

"Massa Bryant, I didn't come to Californy fer gold. I came fer to find you out an' tell you suffin'."

"Well!"—Luke spoke sharp and short, "take care what you talk about. There are things no man living must dare speak to me about."

"I isn't afraid, massa," said the negro firmly. "I's come to talk 'bout your wife—'bout Miss Mary."

"I have no wife, Jupe; go back to your bed."

"No, massa. I's been two year gittin' here, an' I ain't gwine to keep my mouf shet, now. W'at yer s'pose I care fer Injuns, or fever, or hard work? De wu'st pain, all de time, was dis; I keep thinkin'. 'Oh, Jupe, you's so long gettin' dar, an' all dis time young missus in dat prison, night an' day.'"

Luke got up and walked several times across the plateau; then he came back and sat down by his visitor.

"Who told you to come after me, Jupe?"

"Clar', she tol' me. We made it out toged'er; an' we made it up dat I should hunt you up an' tell you how cruel an' unjus' it was fer you to sen' dat letter to your young wife."

"I sent no letter."

"Didn't you?" asked Jupe, eagerly. "Didn't you write, after you heard dat she was—took up?—write, an' tell her how bad she was, an' dat you was nebber comin' home?"

"No. I sent no message. I couldn't write, Jupe. It was as if my heart and hand were palsied."

The silent man, who had never allowed his wife's name to pass his lips, since that day when he had landed in New Orleans from Liverpool to hear the story which met him there, was opening his heart to the poor negro.

"I's glad of it! I's glad of it! It's jus' what Clar' she tol' me; 'Dat bad sister done it all,' says Clar', 'an' you mus' fin' Massa Bryant an' tell him so. Tell him it's Clar's solum belief dat dat wicked gal made all de mischief, an' Miss Mary is jis' as innocent as a new-born babe.'"

"How could she have had any hand in the matter? She was not there at the time."

"She was dar' *not long afore*; an' Clar', she tells me, right away, as soon as Miss Annette came, says she, 'You jus' look out; dat gal is a snake in de grass. She don't lub Miss Mary one bit.' Now, Clar', she says she will take her as-servation dat Miss Annette put dat counterfeit money in Miss Bryant's box, an' took out de good gold, an' she's mighty sart'in she put dem dies in de kag in de garret, 'cause Clar' cotched her comin' down one day, an' she looked kind o' flustered, an' said she'd been up to get some yerbs for a cold. Now, Miss Mary she wa'n't in no sitiuation fer to be climbin' up in dat loft; an' see here! dis is w'at Clar' foun', arter de trile was all ober, w'en we came to move de furniture out o' de house. 'Twas a bit o' blue paper and Miss Mary hadn't none like it; an' Clar', she saw Miss Nettie scribblin' on it, one day, an' it mus' hab blowed away an' got los' behin' de bureau."

He handed Luke half a sheet of letter-paper, worn through in places, and quite black on the outside from long carriage,

"I've stuck to dat through thick an' thin, massa, 'cause Clare she says, 'if massa could see it he could make up his own min'.' Wait till daylight, massa; can't make it out now."

"I can't wait until daylight," muttered Luke, going into his tent, where he struck a light and closely examined the worn paper. It was written over and over with the name of Mary Bryant; and in two places with an order for a piano to be sent to the writer—evidently an attempt of some one to counterfeit his wife's hand. It was like—very like Mary's signature, and yet it was not hers. He recognized it in an instant as a forgery of Annette's. And in that same instant the past spread and yawned before him, showing him the snare which had been laid for him and into which he had fallen—the prison into which a loving and innocent woman had been betrayed—the revenge which had been too fully consummated. He could read it all now, by the light of that scrap of paper.

"Why was this not produced in court?"

His hollow voice alone betrayed his excitement.

"We didn't fin' it till too late. 'Sides, Clar's a nigger, an' she couldn't swear she saw Miss Annette a-writin' it. No, Clar' she says, 'Miss Mary don't car' fer nuffin' in dis world but fer her massa to see she's innocent; so you mus' take de paper to him, an' tell him 'bout our 'spicions,' an' how Clar' she wouldn't never wear none de bandaners w'at Miss Purcell guv her, 'kase she knew she didn't like our missus. Now, Massa Bryant, I's allers been sart'in sure I saw Parcell makin' dat counterfight money in de cave. An' Miss Parcell she ain't no better, dat's so f'."

"Jupe! Jupe! be still, for heaven's sake!"

"I ain't a-gwine to speak anudder word to-night, massa. You kin think it ober, an' make up yer min'. Says Clar', says she, 'Ef Massa Bryant could a-seen his wife in dem fits, when she done readin' his letter, castin' her off, he'd nebber furgib hisself in dis worl'—no nebber! Nobody thought she'd lib, nur de baby, nudder. 'Twas a special dispensary, Clar' says, dat Miss Mary's chile was saved, through it all, to be de purtiest an' brightest babe de Lord ever made.'"

"Miss Mary's chile!"

"Lord, Massa Bryant, didn't you know you had the beautifulest boy in New Bristol?"

A groan burst from Luke's lips, as if it was rent from the center of his heart. The tent would not hold him; he fled out of it, away, down the bed of the dried-up stream, out of sight of man, and flung himself down on the rock in the presence of God alone.

"Now, ef he goes and permits suicide, arter all, Clar'll declar' I's a big fool not to do my erran' better," moaned poor old Jupe, looking out wistfully after the missing man.

CHAPTER IX.

THE END OF ART.

ANNETTE sat by the window of her little eight-by-ten in the second story of her hotel. The day had been oppressive with heat; now, a cool breeze had set in from the Pacific. Pushing the heavy braids back from her brow, she opened the curtains wide to the delicious air. She was

in one of her restless moods. Why did Luke not return from the mountains?—it was midsummer, and not once had he been into the city, though she had heard, through other members of his party, of his whereabouts, and had received remittances with which to supply her daily wants.

"All this time, all this sin, all this waiting—and yet, I have not gained a step," she murmured impatiently. "Only one comfort in it all; and that is, I have had my revenge upon her. Little self-righteous saint, so proud of herself and her husband! Her pride must be humbled by this time! If I don't bring my plot to a consummation before many months, she will be out again!—and then, if she once meets Bryant, it will be all up with my chances. Hark!"

The sound of a familiar voice on the pavement below caused her to look down, and her heart beat quickly upon perceiving Luke Bryant in the midst of a band of just-returned miners. The party was in high spirits, boasting of its good luck; some declared they had "made their pile," and should go home by the next ship—others, that they should "stick to the land of Ophir as long as the dust was to be found 'lying about loose.'" But, who was that Luke had with him, whom he had just lifted from a mule, and to whom he was so attentive? Only a poor "darky," and apparently a sick one. Probably a servant whom he had taken out with him, and who had come down with the fever.

Yet it struck Annette that she had seen the man before. She watched them, furtively, behind her curtain. Suddenly her brain whirled as she recognized Jupe! What had sent him to California? Could it be possible that he had been sent after Master Bryant with any message of importance? Was any thing unfortunate for her to occur, just when she began to see some result of her long endeavor? She grew quite cold with a thrill of fear.

It was in vain that she tried to make herself easy. A dozen possibilities made her tremble. Then she steeled herself to meet the worst, resolved, if any accusations were made, to fight it out with that "woman's weapon," her tongue. Also, she would be prepared for the other contingency—to please and flatter Luke, if nothing had occurred to awaken his suspicions. She rearranged her hair, added a little artificial bloom to her rather sallow cheeks, and put on a white dress in place of the black lawn she had been wearing.

"This black ribbon about my throat will be mourning enough," she thought, and laughed, a hard, heartless laugh, shocking to come from a woman's lips.

She did not go down to tea, ordering a cup in her room. She was afraid to meet the man she had been so impatient to have return. Very soon after tea, before the long summer twilight began to fall, there came a knock at the door, and opening it, she welcomed Luke. He came in, dressed with more care than had been his habit of late years; his beard and hair were trimmed, and he seemed quite like the easy, graceful, handsome man who had won her fancy of old. Yet he was thin and pale. He grew paler as he took her hand, and a strange fire burned in his eyes,

"Annette," said he, holding her hand tightly, "do you love me?"

"Love you?" she stammered. The question had come at last, so unexpectedly, that she was taken unawares. She looked up quickly, but her eyes fell again before that steady, burning gaze.

"I once had reason to think," he continued, in a low voice, "before I married the woman I did, that Annette, not knowing of my engagement to her sister, had allowed herself to become interested in me. Say, was it so?"

"Luke, why do you ask? I *did* love you."

"And do still? Will you be my wife, if I wish it?"

The passionate eyes now returned his fiery regard.

"I would go through fire and water to be your wife, Luke; I never loved my husband. I married him in a fit of desperation and mortified vanity because *you* had slighted me. I was miserable while he lived. Oh, Luke, if I thought that I could make you happy! I scarcely hoped that you would ever trust *any* woman with your happiness again. But, if I could make up the past to you—"

"You can, Annette! you can make me the most blessed man on the face of the earth."

"Dear Luke."

"You can make me very happy, Annette. I only ask a little thing to you. It is but to give me one sweet assurance—to tell me truly—if this piece of paper belongs to you?"

He dragged her to the waning light, and thrust the scrap of letter-paper before her eyes which Jupe had brought from Missouri. For an instant she was bewildered, gazing at it blankly. Then a sense of his full meaning rushed over her, the passion of wrath, instead of love, which moved him—the bitter sneer under the assumed gentleness—the relentless will to humiliate, crush and subdue her. She quailed under the scorn of his look, and would have sunk under the revulsion of feeling had he not upheld her.

"Will you not make me happy, when I ask so small a favor?" he continued, mockingly.

It was only for a moment the woman quailed; for a moment she endured terrible pain at the realization that she had lost forever all hope of the love she coveted; rage at having been led into betraying her own feelings turned her face as white as her dress.

"It must give you great pleasure to seek that kind of revenge on a woman," she said, with a little, spiteful laugh.

"It *does* give me a sort of pleasure," he slowly replied. "I know there is meanness in revenge, but I am not wholly above it. I find it sweet—after all I have suffered. If it were my angel-wife, now, she would be too noble, I know. She would rather pray God to forgive her unnatural sister. But I am a man—with a man's passions; I cannot do it."

"Luke Bryant," said Annette, desperately resolved not yet to give up all, to deny all charges however substantiated, "for what would you be revenged? What new suspicion have you in your brain? I think I recognize that paper as being like some in Mary's portfolio. If you have got up any theory that this scribbling is mine—

that I have been practicing forgery, and a thousand other crimes—that the judge and jury, and the world at large, have made fools of themselves, that everybody is wrong, and only your saintly Mary is right—why speak out. I can bear anything from a man brave enough to fool a woman into confessing her love, for the sake of laughing at her."

"There is no laughter in my heart, girl. It's been a long time since any one has heard me laugh. Though I could laugh at myself, now, to see what an idiot I have been."

"Don't underrate yourself, Mr. Bryant. Some very smart men have been duped by women!"

"Annette, you have taken ample revenge against one who never harmed you, against the gentlest, most loving of sisters. I do not complain of the agony you have caused me. If you have done any of this through the hope of some time winning my favor, know that all such hope is ended. The reparation I now demand of you is that you shall tell me all, from beginning to end. Mary is innocent and you are guilty."

"Then why do you ask for proofs? You'd better take your wife on trust."

"I only wish to satisfy the world. I demand a written statement."

"At my expense? Really, sir, that is cool."

"Take your choice between that and being arrested, on suspicion of forgery and passing counterfeit money. I have no doubt that, upon my return to the States, I can obtain overwhelming proof that your husband was connected with a gang of counterfeiters, and that you assisted in getting the spurious coin into circulation."

"You are welcome to try it. All that will not clear your wife. I shall still continue to swear that she was one of us."

"Then you refuse to confess?"

"Most decidedly."

"I shall place this matter in this hands of the officers of the law."

She made him a mocking courtesy as he turned away.

"That game is up," she muttered, as the door closed. "I don't believe he will say anything to the officers about me. He will go home and get his wife pardoned out, if her time does not expire too soon to make it worth while, and they'll live together again, as happy as two doves. Fortunately, I'm in California. I can do something yet."

She knew that, unless Bryant ruined her reputation by telling of her guilt, she could yet make a brilliant marriage. Her passion for the man who had twice humiliated her was turned into hate. She had hated Mary, before; now she bestowed the same feeling on both. But to go back.

When Luke had announced, the morning after Jupe's arrival, that he must return immediately to San Francisco, his party concluded to break up and go with him. Every mile of the rough journey back to the city appeared to Luke equal to a hundred ordinary miles. If he could have annihilated space, and found himself once more on the banks of the Missouri, by the sacrifice of all his fortune, he would have done it. When he reached San Francisco he learned that he would have to wait three or four days for a steamer. It was in vain that he wished himself on the way home!

Great wrongs can not always be righted the hour in which they are detected. Bitter suffering and anguish had been, and was yet to be, on account of his too hasty acceptance of the statement of another against her whom he never should have deserted, even in her guilt. That he was now convinced of it, and wished to do all in his power to repair it—if, indeed, any reparation would be accepted or possible—would not hasten, by a day, the wearisome conclusion of the drama.

The course he had pursued toward Annette was prompted by that first impulse of vengeance, which longed to inflict a little of the pain which she had caused him. To crush her with contempt, to laugh her to scorn, seemed to him the only punishment he could mete out to one of her sex. Had she been a man he should have known with what weapons to attack.

That night, after leaving her, he hesitated whether or not to put his threat into execution. He finally put aside the matter, and took his business affairs into consideration. Since he must remain several days in San Francisco, he might as well help to pass the lagging time, by putting these into shape. His investments in lots and buildings were such as promised to make him rich, simply by the increase of value they would have from the growth of the city. Not certain that he should wish to return to California, he thought to take with him all the money possible, leaving his real estate to take care of itself.

It had been a sultry day. That night the wind blew. Everything lay crackling in this dewless wind, for no rain had fallen for many weeks. After seeing Jupe stowed away in comfortable quarters, Luke wandered about till a late hour. He went down along the docks, returning by way of the block of buildings which he owned, and rented out at fabulous rents to various merchants. As he strayed about, his attention was attracted to a glimmering light, which certainly was not the rising moon. Presently he heard the cry of "Fire!"—fearful cry in that city of a day, unprotected by fire engines, crowded with wooden shanties.

Hardly had the alarm been raised, before the conflagration had assumed frightful proportions. The wind arose, as the heat rarefied the air, rushing and roaring along, bringing scattered flakes of flame to light the scourge in different places at once. The street on which stood Luke's property was soon red with the advancing fire; ere an hour had passed, his stores tumbled down upon their ruined contents. There was no insurance for San Francisco property in those days; Luke's loss was heavy; the month before he would not have cared for it, but now he had a half-formed feeling, as if splendor of worldly gear could repay Mary for some of her wrongs, and he was sorry to see the destruction of the best part of his income. His loss he could well bear, however, when he compared it with many others, men who, when the sun went down, were worth their hundreds of thousands, when it arose were penniless.

Still the sea of fire rolled and spread, overflowing half the city. Many aspects of the scene were grotesque as well as appalling. Luke went hither and thither, cool and courageous,

lending a helping hand wherever he could. One poor Chinaman he pulled out of his little shop by the tail of his head, just as the shanty fell about his ears. He aided in tearing down buildings, in hopes of arresting the fire by depriving it of its food, but the high wind carried it triumphantly over gaping spaces. He had been out several hours, and had followed on before the monster, working until quite exhausted, when he found himself not far from his boarding-place. Half an hour before, that street had been considered safe. Many of the inmates of the hotel, tired with looking at, or working at the flames, had retired to rest. Now, the hotel was all ablaze! Luke thought of Jupe, and was rushing up to see if he were safe, when a great cry of horror ran through the multitude. It was supposed that all the women and children had been taken from the building, which was burning downward from the upper story, when a woman appeared at one of the windows. The room in which she stood was already on fire; they could see the flames behind her, as her slender figure appeared in the casement. She acted as if half-stifled and stupefied by the smoke, evidently not understanding the directions shouted to her from below.

"Hold on! only one instant. For God's sake, only one moment! Here is the ladder now, hurrah! we have it! My God, she has jumped."

As the fire began to scorch in its close approach, the bewildered woman, not conscious of the orders given her, leaped madly to the hard pavement. It was but a single story down, but a shudder ran through the crowd, which knew that she could not escape without injury. One moment more, and she would have been saved. Or her fall might have been broken, had any one been prepared for it. As it was, she came heavily to the ground and was taken up insensible. "Dead," was the first cry, but it was soon found that she breathed.

"Oh, massa, dat Miss Annette!"

"Yes, Jupe, I know it."

"Is she a friend of yours? Come, I will go with you. I am a doctor."

A young gentleman took Luke by the arm, and hurried him forward, seeing that his dread and agitation made him hesitate.

The slender form, still dressed in the white robes which it had put on to ensnare Luke, was taken to a place of comparative quiet, and an examination made into the nature of the injuries received by the unconscious victim. Her head and shoulders had endured the full force of the blow when she struck the pavement; it was the opinion of the physician that she would never revive, but gradually sink and expire without coming out of her comatose state.

Shelter, in a quarter avoided by the flames, was at length found for her, and while the fire was gradually dwindling out in the gray dawn, and the smoke fell like a pall over the devastated city, Luke sat by the couch watching the last hours of the one who had committed so deep and deadly a wrong against him and his.

In that solemn time he could not say that he forgave Annette; he was simply awe-stricken at this sudden punishment which circumstances had meted out to her. He could not think of her great sin and its consequences, without a

shudder of aversion. And yet, he pitied her—he could not leave her to die, alone, amid strangers.

All at once the hitherto motionless eyelids quivered and flew wide open; the great, black eyes, so lately kindling with every human passion, dim, and half-vacant, fixed themselves upon Luke's face. After a time, a look, as if she recognized him, came into them.

"Luke!"

He started, the voice was so firm and natural.

"God has granted me a moment of consciousness in which to beg your forgiveness. I have had thoughts and seen visions, when those around me thought me stunned. It was a strange state. I cannot describe it. But I had time to review the past. One thinks fast in the moment of death."

Here she paused, and it was only at intervals that she could go on—a few words at a time—but she said all she wished in the half-hour before the fluttering breath finally took flight from her lips. In that confession, Luke learned all the particulars of the subtle plot she had invented to ruin his wife and tear her from his too-loving arms.

"Mary will forgive me when she hears that I am dead. But, Luke, you cannot," was the last sentence Annette spoke.

And truly, the groan which he uttered, as her spirit passed, was not for the guilty dying, so much as for the innocent living.

CHAPTER X.

THE FACE UPON THE PANE.

"Oh, Jupel oh, Jupe! you's dead and gone, I know. Else you nebber would treat your poor missus so. You nebber would treat your poor missus so!"

Auntie Clare had no idea that she was putting the grief of her heart into song. She held a little child in her arms as she rocked back and forth in an old splint-bottomed rocking-chair, in the very room where she was first introduced to our acquaintance. As she crooned to the sleeping child the words came to her lips, which had become constant in her thoughts. Three years! almost three whole years, and no word yet from the humble messenger who had gone on his long journey with so much hope and determination. Surely, her husband was dead, Master Bryant would never know the story he had been sent to tell, Miss Bryant would die in that miserable prison, Miss Miller would never see Miss Mary again, "de face ob de Lord was done sot ag'in' de whole family."

Ole Clare felt very lonesome and downcast that bleak and snowy evening. With a high heart and the courage of unselfish love, she had worked, and planned, and hoped for three long years. At last she felt that she was breaking down under her load of care and suspense.

"Oh, Lord, Jupe's gone up to glory, I know, an' I can't hol' out much longer. All I asks is to keep up strenf to min' this babe till his murder comes out o' prison, like Peter in de Bible."

"Maumy," said the little fellow, unclosing his bright eyes and patting her black face with his dimpled hand, "are you sure Santa Claus is going to put suffin' nice in my 'tocking to-night?"

"Bless yer little heart, honey, I's sartain sure. I's heard him creakin' around in de snow outside dis long time, but he won't come down chimney 'till he sees y'ur fas' asleep."

The great bright eyes, wide with wonder and excitement, stared at the open-mouthed chimney, and the little stocking hung near by, until sleep again got the better of them, and they winked off into innocent dreams of the bliss of to-morrow. The old nurse held him long after he was sound asleep, quite forgetting to put him to bed beside his grandmother, who was moaning and turning in her slumber, in the bedroom off the large apartment.

How came these three persons back in the little house which they had deserted to live in the town which held their Mary a prisoner? Alas! the small measure of prosperity which was first meted out to the convict, in having her friends close at hand, was taken away before the end of the first year. Upon Clare's once failing to remit her monthly wages, her master ordered her home. Being in Jefferson City, he enforced his mandate, by taking her with him. When the weeping slave went to the prison to announce the sad tidings, Mary, sore as was the loss and grief to herself, at once decided that her mother and child must return also to their old home. Her mother was too feeble and broken to be trusted, in that strange place, to take care of herself, much less the infant. By going back to New Bristol she would be amid old neighbors, who surely would not allow her to suffer want; and Clare could still continue to exercise watchfulness over the little one. She promised Mary to win her master's consent to living out, as she had done. She would make it her home with Mrs. Miller, and she had no fear but that New Bristol would afford her work enough to make up her hire to her owner.

So Mary stilled the cry of her heart, hardening it to part with her only joy and solace—her beautiful babe. There was a sound of weeping in the prison, when little Luke was taken away; but his mother shed no tears. She had shed so many that the fountain was dry.

She only repeated over and over—"three years!"

The money which had been placed at interest after the sale of the homestead served to buy it back again; for Mary had said that when her term expired, she intended to return to the place of her condemnation, and live down the false judgment pronounced against her.

For two years Clare had faithfully carried out Mary's suggestions, which accorded so well with the promptings of her own affectionate nature. Mrs. Miller, feeble and broken down, was almost as much of a care to her as the child; except that, when auntie was out at work, she could watch and feed little Luke. It is probable that, of the two, the colored woman suffered much the more; as Mrs. Miller had sunk into a sort of complaining endurance, finding comfort in gently nursing her sense of being an ill-used person; while poor Clare had not only the burden of their physical support, but all the loneliness consequent upon Jupe's absence, and all the anxiety of constant, wearing suspense and ever-defeated hope. She never

complained of her solitary hours, when grandmother and babe were asleep, and she sat gazing into the kitchen coals, surmising, fearing. She would have given much, in these times, for the privilege of delivering a curtain-lecture to patient Jupe. Poor Clare! she had no use for the broomstick now! There was no one to come "within' roun'," whom she could scold for every thing which went amiss—even for rain on washing-day!—and to be deprived of somebody to find fault with was no small loss of itself. For, as to scolding little Luke, or giving a fretful word to his grandmother, she would no more have thought of it than of cutting off her hand.

And now it was Christmas Eve!

No wonder her grief came down upon her soul with a weight too great to bear. Beside other hearths in other homes, what music and laughter and feasting! How happy was her own race at prospects of a week's holiday! How blessed other children, who had fathers and mothers to load them with childhood's treasures! Poor little fellow! deserted by his father, his mother pining, that festival night, in a prison!—no one to love him but old Aunt Clare! She smoothed his tumbled, glistening curls with her ugly, black hand. His cheeks were rosy with slumber, a smile hovered in the dimples of his mouth: he knew nothing of his wrongs; maumy's love sufficed for him.

He was three years and three weeks old. On his birthday had come a little red frock, which his mother had embroidered for him by the light which came through her grated window. He wore the frock now, a mass of light, as the fire shone against it; and his plump, white legs, with the stockings all slipped down, looked whiter by the contrast. He was a very beautiful child; fit to give delight and awaken pride in parents' hearts.

Clare had resolved that his Christmas should not pass unmarked. She had performed extra toil to secure a little spending money, and now, a store of candles, a toy drawer, and a pair of pretty red shoes lay concealed in the cupboard, awaiting the time to be slipped into or hung beside the expectant stocking.

Long after her accustomed hour Clare sat, rocking and crooning, holding the boy, quite unmindful that she should have undressed him and put him to bed hours before. The wind moaned about the little house; the great old cottonwood tree outside creaked ever and anon, so as to make a thrill run through all Clare's bones, for she had all the superstitions of her race. She heard the horns blowing on distant plantations, and knew that the colored people were having jolly times; she heard, too, the winding of the stage-horn, and knew that the mail-coach had come and gone through New Bristol. She was dreaming the vista of her life over. Once, when a little sleety gust shook the window, she rolled her eyes toward it uneasily and almost screamed; it seemed to her she saw Miss Mary's face looking in at her child.

"Oh, Lord, don't let no spooks come rovin' dis blessed Christmas Eve," she muttered. "De good Lord will tak' car' little Luke an' his ole maumy. But, oh, I's tired! I's tired! I's done fur, sart'in sure, I can't hol' out annudder year. I's sorry eber I sent Jupe off. Dat poor ole

critter's give out on de way. He was faithful as a day; I know he nebber would stop till he dropped down in his tracks. He mus' be killed or died o' fever, or caught an' sol' down Souf. He's dead, an' dat bit o' paper los', so's Miss Mary can't have it to show fur herself. I's sorry Jupe went," and she began to sing again.

"Oh Jupel oh, Jupel you's dead an' gone, I know," and as she sung, big tears rolled down her ebony face, sparkling in the firelight, and dropping on the broad, warm bosom which supported the child's head. Again the sleet rattled on the window, and auntie, looking around, thought she saw a face pressed against the pane; but her eyes were too dim with tears to be certain of anything. "I do begin to feel right cur'us," she muttered, ceasing to sing, and sitting upright. "It seems to me ebery minute as if Jupe was g'wine to open dat door, jes' as common as ef he was only out to do up de chores. My soul's as light as a feather, all to oncet. I feel as if I was gwine right up t'rough de roof, jest as when I dream 'bout flyin'. Good gracious! I'd make a purty figger, flyin', wid dis ole caliker dress, an' dem scuffs on my feet. No, no; I pines to go to glory, w'en I's done used up, but I ain't jes' ready yit to be transcribed. I wants to see dis babe safe in his mudder's arms, and git my w'ite robes done ready—den I's prepared for de will ob de Lord. Wat makes me feel so cur'us? It mus' be kase it's Christmas night—half-past 'leven now—'twill soon be Jesus' birt-day, sure 'nough. 'Pears to me, de spirits ob de hull family has come back to keep Christmas in dar ole home."

One spirit had come back—a living spirit in its human body, and was hovering, out in the dark and cold, feeding its starved eyes upon the brightness of the scene within. When Clare thought she had seen a face pressed against the glass she was not mistaken. Little Luke's mother stood there, devouring with eager eyes, the sweet picture of her child asleep in maumy's arms. The stage, coming into the village at eleven o'clock had set her down at the cross-street, and she had walked in the snow and darkness with what strange feelings! to the home from which she had been torn on a summer morning years ago.

As the bright light of the kitchen fire shone out of the window, whose paper shade Clare seldom thought to draw down, Mary approached it first, pausing there to still the wild beating of her heart. She did not wish to startle the inmates—above all things, she dreaded to frighten her child, lest he should not come to her, fearing that he would reject the caresses she was yearning to bestow. Looking in, she beheld, and stood entranced by the beautiful vision. Gone was all sense of weariness, hunger or cold; there were food, warmth and rest—there life and joy! Her boy! her beautiful babe! for two years she had been cruelly robbed of him. When she saw him last, he could not walk, and now, how he had grown! How sweet, how healthy, how happy he looked! If she could go in and waken him, he would cry, may be, he would be afraid of her. No, she would wait until Clare had laid him in his bed.

That Mrs. Bryant should be in New Bristol that Christmas Eve was as unexpected by her,

one week before, as it would now prove to her family. It seemed that the chaplain and officers of the penitentiary, and many others, had been working privately to obtain her release, before the expiration of her term. Her good conduct, and the need which her child had of her care and protection, were the grounds upon which the pardon was asked and obtained. It was intended to come into effect in time for her to reach home by Christmas; and she had been provided with means for the journey, and sent away, the very day upon which she was so unexpectedly set free. Two days and nights she had been riding over the rough winter roads; but, as she stood there, gazing in at that home from which she had been so cruelly taken, she felt nothing, for the time being, but the joy of beholding her child.

Past suffering, future desolation, all were swept down by this master passion. Her husband had condemned, deserted her, but this child was life of her life, soul of her soul. She still had something to love.

All the bells of New Bristol rung out a sudden chime—the horns on the plantation blew ear-splitting blasts—the little fellow in Clare's arms stirred at the sound, and she, arising, bore him out of the firelight into the shadow, away into the adjoining bedroom to lay him down. When she reappeared, a hand was on the latch, the door slowly opened, and auntie, at the same time, opened her mouth to scream, but the intruder held up a warning finger in time.

"Don't scream, auntie; it is only Mary!"

"Oa, good Lord!" whispered Clare, sinking down upon the floor in a flat "cheese," like a top-stool which had been trodden upon. "Is it you, or your ghos', Miss Mary?"

"Myself, auntie; not my ghost at all. Don't make a noise, for you will frighten the baby and my poor mother. It might kill mother, if the shock should be too sudden. They have pardoned me out, at last, auntie. I see my boy is well."

Mary came and put her arms about Clare, kissing the cheek of her faithful servant.

"I shall not disturb them to-night, auntie; I have seen him, and that is joy enough for once. I was standing at the window a long time. You must break the news gently, in the morning, to mother, before I see her. If you will give me a cup of tea I will drink it, and go immediately to bed; for I wish to rise early. And mind you, don't bring Luke in until I am up and dressed."

"Laws, missus, how can you wait?"

"Because I want him to love me, auntie. I cannot bear it, if he turns away from me. And now I am so prison-worn and travel-worn, I wish to brighten up and put on another dress."

"Dar's suffa' in dat, honey; but I jes' 'sure you dat boy'd know his mudder."

"Have you something to put in the darling's stocking?"

"You jes' bet I 'tended to dat, missus!"

"Here's something the convicts who were there when he came away sent him" and she took from her little bag a pair of prison-made shoes, cunning things, finished in the most elaborate manner, a basket woven by one of the basket-makers, and several ingenious toys which the prisoners had pleased their fancies by making.

Auntie got up out of her "all-of-a-heap," and made the cup of tea.

"Oh, I do want to cry and holler awful," she whispered, as she poured it out and brought it to her young mistress. "My heart is jus' swellin' too big fer my body; but I knows 't would frighten Miss Miller, an' if I don't dissolve I sha'n't gib way."

"That's a brave auntie," said Mary; "you see how brave I am. It is best to wait until morning, and we must do what is best."

"You's allers right, missus. And now, dar's, your bedroom. We fixed it up w'en we fus' come back, 'cause we liked to think of de time w'en you would be home. I put on clean sheets las' week, an' aired an' dusted it. You take a good, sweet sleep, an' plenty o' time to dress yerself in de mornin'."

Mary crept softly to bed; she could hear her child breathe through the thin partition; and to that sweet music she fell asleep. When she awoke it was quite light; little Luke was shouting with delight over that stocking.

"Here's warm water, Miss Mary, and de keys to yer trunks. Jes' you put on yer prettiest dress. Lor', chile, how yer do tremble! Now, you take your time—yer mudder ain't up yet, and breakfas' won't be ready dis hour. I's had to kill chickens an' set muffins. Hark, jes' hear dat darlin' laugh!"

"If I listen to that, auntie, I shall never get dressed."

"Well, I'll go out and leabe yer to yerself. Take yer time, honey."

The glass showed Mary a face thin and wan, but so lighted up with love and expectation, so exalted by an habitual expression of patience, as to be hardly less lovely than the blooming features which that little mirror had so often reflected in days gone by. She carefully brushed and curled her hair, which, knowing she might soon be released, the matron had allowed to pass untrimmed, and which now lay in wavy masses about brow and throat. Then she took from the long-unopened trunk a blue merino dress.

"He will not be afraid of me," she whispered, smiling at herself in the mirror, and the young mother went forth to claim her child.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PEACE THAT PASSETH ALL UNDERSTANDING.

AUNT CLARE'S famous Christmas breakfast was a thing of the past. The dishes were washed, and a huge turkey was now undergoing a process of stuffing quite different from that by which it had been accustomed to stuff itself. Mrs. Miller sat in her arm-chair, gently smiling at the group upon the carpet. Mary, rosy with the exercise, was tossing a ball for Luke, stopping every third moment to snatch him to her bosom and cover his face, neck and arms with kisses. In the excitement of the hour, the marks of years of anguish faded out for the time being. No one, looking at her, could have guessed at the years of agony which had bowed that young head. She was a child again, with her child.

"Who am I?" she would ask him over and over again.

And every time he said "My mamma," she would catch him up and kiss him.

In the midst of their frolic a knock came to the door. Mary started to retreat into her room; she did not so soon feel ready to meet the prying eyes of curious neighbors; but, the door was opened by the one who knocked, a boy from the hotel, who thrust a letter upon a chair near by.

"It's for Mrs. Mary Bryant," he remarked, rolling his eyes around to catch a glimpse of the woman who had been in jail, and instantly darting out of the door as he met her gentle look.

"There must be some mistake, unless the chaplain has written to me, as he promised. But *that* would not have come so soon."

She picked up the letter, and a cry escaped her lips.

"What is it, Mary?"

"It looks like Luke's handwriting, mother. I must go to my room."

Mary closed her door, and sunk upon a chair by the window. The sight of the letter recalled too vividly that hour of anguish in which she had last read a message from *him*. For some time, she would not open the envelope. Her face was burning with indignation.

All these years he had abandoned her! Why did he trouble her now? Had he heard so soon that her punishment was over?—and, if so, of what interest could that possibly be to him? The answer to all these questions lay folded in her lap. After a time, she broke the seal and read:

"MARY.—I was with you on your journey from Jefferson City. You did not know it, for I kept an outside place, and evaded recognition; for, to tell the truth, I was not brave enough to expose myself to your scorn. I went to Jefferson City to obtain an interview with you, when I learned that you had been that day released; and, although for five months it seemed as if the leaden hours would never move fast enough to bring me into your presence to confess the wrong I did you, when I really had it in my power to meet you face to face, I shrunk from your just indignation. Mary, I followed you up the hill last night. I was near you as you stood at the window, gazing at *our child*. Oh, why did I not then fall at your feet, in the snow, and ask you to spurn me—to spurn my worthless love? How hollow, how mocking must that word sound from my lips! Yet, Mary, I love you, have always loved you, even when I thought you guilty.

"I never wrote that cruel letter, casting you off, which you received. It was written by the same false hand which so successfully forged your *letter to me*, for I, too, upon my arrival from Liverpool, at New Orleans, received a letter from you (as I believed), confessing your crime, and asking me to keep away from you for the present. It said that you preferred to bear the consequences alone; and withal, was so cool and so seemingly little concerned at the misery inflicted upon me, that, in the rashness of my first sorrow and shame, I took passage for California, and was far out to sea again before I had time to rationally consider matters. But, Mary, I loved you all the time. It was because I loved you that I was so crushed by the news. And I had hardly got out of sight of land before I regretted that I had not disobeyed you, had not flown to you, and fought for you, protected you, if possible, from the consequences of your folly.

"I need not tell you who is the guilty one, who made us all this wretchedness. It could be but one—your sister, Annette. She is dead, so I will try not to name her too harshly. She had a selfish, passionate nature; but her wild schemes are now at an end.

She told me all in her dying hour. I will give you the slightest sketch of it, for I have not courage to meet you, unless, by this confession, I win your permission.

"She said, that from the hour that she first met me, on the boat coming from St. Louis, she had fancied me above other men; that she had been jealous of my preference for you; that she made her hasty marriage in a fit of anger and unhappiness, not knowing that Mr. Parcell was really so bad a man as he was. Learning his true character by degrees, she had been more and more unhappy; but, instead of leaving him, was tempted to fall in with his practices, and had aided him in getting rid of large quantities of counterfeit money.

"Then I asked her to visit you, and boasted of my too great happiness. Oh, Mary, shall I ever dare to hope for happiness again? The demon of jealousy awoke, more furious than before. She went to you, meaning to do you evil. Knowing that her own life was one of sin which might any day result in disgrace, she resolved to drag you down, to ruin your happiness, to destroy my trust in you. She placed the dies in the garret, and counterfeit money in your box. Several times during her visit, she secretly took good bank bills from your purse, replacing them with counterfeits. She induced you to buy fine things, and forged the order for the piano, that, when you were accused, there would be circumstantial evidence to strengthen the main fact.

"When I arrived in New Orleans I was met by your letter ordering me not to come home. I went to Annette. She said that she had heard the story, and gave me all the particulars; asking me if she had not warned me before my marriage that you were a natural thief, and adding that she had suspected you when she was there, from the manner in which you had 'dashed out,' etc. She did *not* tell me that you would soon be a mother. Had I known that, I never should have left you, even at your own command.

"As it is, I do not understand it. The blow was so unexpected as to destroy the calmness of my reasoning faculties; and before I could calmly review the case, I was far on my way to California. I have been all the time like one walking in darkness. I never *felt* you guilty. Ever in my dreams I saw you mine, my Mary, pure and sweet; I loved you as such, married you as such, and yet, when I thought to go back to you there was the letter, there the apparent *facts*.

"Parcell and his wife came to California. He died, and she tried to win my affections from you. I sorrowed for you as for one dead. I never thought of any other woman. She never could have moved me to think of her. But, in the midst of my sad life, Jupe came. Faithful, devoted friend! He will some time describe to you the extraordinary perils and delays of his journey. He brought me a piece of paper. It was not much, but I saw upon it Annette's attempt at forgery, and, as by a flash of lightning, the whole truth was revealed to me.

"I hastened to her and accused her; she denied all. That night, as if by the anger of Heaven at her evil-doing, the hotel in which she boarded burned down, and, in leaping from a window, she was fatally injured. She revived long enough to bear witness to the truth, and died, saying that Mary would forgive her. Can you, Mary?

"This was last July. I started, with Jupe, in the next steamer for the States; but my mental powers had been long overtaken by grief, and I had willfully neglected my physical health; the consequence was that I was unfit to bear the great revulsion of feeling which came upon me. I was ill when we reached Panama, and having to wait there several days for a vessel on the other side, in the hot weather, the fever took hold of my system (so well prepared for it), and when the ship sailed I was unable to go on.

"I was very ill—unconscious for weeks—and it is

to Jupe's skillful nursing that I owe my life. It was late in November before I came out of that long struggle with strength enough to dare the ocean. At last I left that hateful, wearisome place; we flew over the ocean; at last my foot was ashore again at New York. We hastened on. Jupe, my faithful attendant, reaching Jefferson City the day you were liberated. I saw you, my Mary, your pale, sweet face; your dignified, resigned bearing; and I loved and honored you as we honor the saints and martyrs of old. Every pang which you have suffered makes you the dearer to me.

"Ah, believe that I, too, have known days and nights of agony. You will see it in my face if you say that I may come to you. I was so near you when you were in the stage, yet restrained from speaking to you. At the last moment I was a coward; and there were always strangers present. I wanted to steal into the coach at night, and hold you in my arms, I knew you must be so tired. I made Jupe stay behind for the next stage, lest he should betray us.

"Last night—ah, Mary, my wife, that is an angel-child of ours! I *must* say ours! Can you keep me from him?—can you keep me from my child, my wife?

"I have written this since I saw you go into the house at midnight. I will send it, with all its faults, and wait here until you return me some answer. I will not come to you until you bid me. LUKE."

It is not difficult to guess what the wife's answer was to be.

Arising, with the letter in her hand, she stepped out into the family room, and said to her mother:

"Luke is in New Bristol. He wants to come and see his boy."

"And are you going to allow it?"

"Yes, mother."

"Thank God for that, Mary!" said a voice behind her, and turning, there stood Luke in the door.

His resolve to wait an answer to his letter had melted like the snow in the sun. He had stood outside for the last half hour, every moment putting his hand on the latch, and as often withdrawing it. But he heard what Mary said, and then the barrier was overthrown.

He will let down the curtain on our little scene, only drawing it up again a brief while later, for a glance at Auntie Clare. She stood there, alone, forgotten, her apron over her head, sobbing.

"Why, auntie, what is the matter?" asked Luke; wife and child had quite driven old black Clare out of his thoughts.

"Jupe!" she moaned. "You's come home an' not brought Jupe. Oh, I knowed he was done gone dead long ago. Oh, I's sorry I eber druv him off. I misgib I wasn't allers a good wife to him. Many's de time I's took de broomstick to him, ji's 'cause I was cross an' tired. I neber do it again, if I could only see Jupe once more."

"Well, auntie, dry your eyes and put on your new calico, for Jupe will be here to-night, to live with us and be happy all the remainder of his days, I hope, for he is one of my very best friends, auntie. There, there—don't forget what you promised about the broomstick."

Clare dropped her apron and stood gazing at him, during this speech, with eyes which opened wider and wider. Before it was finished, she began to laugh, a hysterical chuckle which shook

her broad form like the breeze running through a circus-tent.

"You's de same boy as eber, Massa Bryant," she giggled, as soon as she could speak, "allers bringin' good news! You neber used to come in de house widout a message for somebody, dat was calkilated to refreshen 'em. De only pity is, eber you went away. If yer hadn't done gone away, dar nebber would have been bad luck. My advice to Miss Mary is, nebber to let go yer coat-tail again. If I was her, I'd hab a good stout apron-string, an' I'd keep you tied to it all your born days."

"You'll have to lend me one of your aprons, auntie—one of those that you used to tie around Jupe when you made him wash the dishes for you while you sat in the splint-bottomed chair, with the hymn-book upside down, and sung hymns to spur him up."

"How you know de hymn-book was wrong side up?" asked auntie, quickly; she was always ambitious to appear to love learning. "Wrong side up fer white folks, but colored folks wouldn't have de presumption to read de same way as dem."

"So you make de hymns stand on their heads, do you, in token of humility?" burst in Luke, with one of his old-fashioned, merry laughs which used to be so contagious. He had not laughed in that care-free, happy way from what seemed time immemorial.

"Dar now, I's willin' yer should poke yer fun at me, if it sets ye to laughin' that way. But dar's no jokin' 'bout dem aprons, Miss Mary. I *did* use to git a heap o' work out o' poor Jupe. He'd grumble, sometimes, but I'd shet him up as quick as a door. I's been oneasy about it since, an' I's promised de Lord, often, on my knees, if he'd bring Jupe safe home, I'd deform my little faults and be a fus'rate wife. Whar did you say he was, Massa Bryant? An' is it possible Jupe r'aly had de sense, arter all, to git cl'ar out to Californy?"

"He did indeed, through perils that would have killed or discouraged a less devoted man. If it had not been for him, I should not now be here. My friends have been too good to me; I have not deserved such forbearance," and Luke pressed tightly the smaller hand which lay in his own.

"'Deed, massa, I nebber should 'a' sent Jupe wid dat piece o' paper on *your* 'count, an' dat's so! We was all powerful mad at you fer leavin' Miss Mary in her troubles. We sent it intirely on *her* account. We know'd she was innocent, an' we was boun' you should know it."

"Oh, auntie," said Mary, her voice trembling, "and you never told me any thing of what you had done—never said what had become of Jupe! You sent him off on that hard journey, while you worked, night and day, to support my child and mother. Luke, what do you think of love like that? But, why, Clare, did you not tell me where Jupe had gone?"

"'Cause, Miss Mary, I know'd 'twas problematical if he made out his arrand; an' if he failed, you'd be wuss disappointed dan if he'd nebber went! So I jes' keep still."

"Dear auntie!"

"But you hasn't tol' me whar my husban' is, Massa Bryant."

"He will arrive in the stage to-night. I left him behind, at Jefferson City, because I did not wish my wife to know who was keeping guard over her, during her long stage-ride. But Jupe will be here this evening, and you must fly around, Clare, and prepare a suitable reception for him. You must kill the fatted calf, auntie."

"Laws, massa, Jupe ain't de profligate son, and I hain't got no fatted calf at dis season ob de year. But I got a twenty-poun' turkey, which is killed and stuffed in honor o' Miss Bryant's comin' home las' night; and I reckon it'll answer fer all on us to rejoice wid. Ef I could 'a' foreseen de future, I'd a-put more raisins in de mince pies, but, such as dey are, you's welcome. I mus' fly roun', sure 'nough. You hain't tol' me 'bout Jupe's findin' you out in dat wild Californy, yit."

"Hadn't you rather wait and hear the whole story from his own lips, auntie? I don't wish to rob Jupe of the glory of relating his own adventures."

"Dar's somefin' in dat, sure 'nough. An' I mus' make dat poun'-cake in less'n no time. Well, well! I reckon I kin wait till night. I's waited a good long time 'fore dis."

The Christmas dinner which Auntie Clare served to the family was worthy of the occasion, which is saying much for the dinner. How the good soul did so much, and so well, in the midst of the joyful "flustration" of which she complained, must remain a part of the wonder which we feel, that for months and years she had borne the toils and troubles of others to this triumphant termination.

The news of Miss Bryant's arrival home, simultaneously with that of Luke Bryant, flew through the settlement like light. With every turkey which was carved that day, their story, as known or guessed at, was also carved and sent round, an appetizing addition to the feast. But we will give the people credit for a delicacy of feeling which prevented them from intruding upon the family on the day of its reunion; it enjoyed its dinner unmolested by curiosity. Only one old woman toiled up the slippery road, opened the door of the cottage, poked in her head and stared at its inmates for a moment, without giving them the greeting of the day.

"I told 'em I shouldn't believe it till I see'd it with my own eyes," she said, in a loud key, shaking her head as she withdrew it, to retire as she had come.

Honor to whom honor is due. Not only did Jupe receive a welcome which thawed all the frost out of his bones, but never, thereafter, did he or his wife want for rest and plenty. Provided with a home of their own, on the Bryant farm, they had nothing to do but wait upon themselves and pet little Luke. At first Mr. Bryant talked of making California his permanent residence, thinking their home in New Bristol could never be pleasant to them after what had occurred. But, the truth having become known, remorse seized upon those who had condemned the innocent; the Bryants became as popular as they had once been persecuted—which good effect was due, also, no doubt, to rumors of wealth in California, which Luke had no reason to deny.

THE END.

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